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THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE THIRD VOLUME.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SLEEPING CASTLE.

THERE are few things that try the tender human heart so cruelly as the revisiting a home-scene from which Death, or even Absence, has taken away that which made it Home; for however dear the external aspects of nature may be to us—and to some they are very dear—it is the association which they possess with our loves and friendships which, after all, forms their most sacred charm. The wood may wave as greenly, the fountain leap as brightly, and the lake reflect the peaceful

sky as faithfully as of yore, but there is something missing to the inward eye, which mars their beauty more completely than if some drought had stripped the trees of every leaf, and robbed the stream of its song, and the mere of its silver flood. Nature seems cruel then.

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,
How *can* ye bloom so fresh and fair !
How *can* ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae weary, fu' o' care !

is a thought that stabbed many a breast,
before Burns so touchingly expressed it.

Ye'll break my heart, ye little birds,
That wanton through the flowery thorn ;
Ye mind me o' departed joys,
Departed never to return.

Never—*never*. And yet the sun shines, as
in the days when it was wont to gladden

us, nor has the treasury of heaven, at night, lost a single star. "From end to end," writes another poet, very different from the Ayrshire Ploughman, but equally susceptible of this divine regret—"from end to end of all the landscape underneath, I find no place that doth not breathe some gracious memory of my friend." But while he was *with* us, what had we to do with memories? All is changed to us, although the scene remains the same—lovely as ever, and ready to enchant new eyes; the heartless beauty smiles even upon *us*, who have found out her falsehood. Yet Nature is not false for being fair. It is we who are altered, and not She. It is Spring with her again, as it was with us once—ah me, how long ago!—for she renews her youth-time yearly. The Summer odours are

as sweet now as then, and borne by the same bright clear airs, which drive the self-same seas of meadow-grass, although their shores may shift a little (as those of ocean do) from copse to cornfield. The cradles of fresh moss, with their coverlets of wild-flowers, invite us as of old—only we are no longer children. The shadows flicker and pass athwart the face of the pool, and fade away into light (like a good man's death), exactly as they were wont to do; but in the faithful depths, we see a wan, worn face, and the white head, where once the smile was mirrored, and the crown of flowers. The garden, to our eyes, has become a wilderness, nay, a very place of tombs, beneath each of which is buried a dead joy.

Thus was it with Mildred Clyffard, as

her long lonely journey northwards drew to its close, and through the windows of the post-chaise she began to discern the well-remembered scenes amid which her love had ripened for him who was no longer with her. She had travelled all night, and at early dawn Ribble had shot up before her fair and green, with its great wall of limestone looking in the distance like a mural crown; Ribble, within which her troth had been first plighted. Then for many an hour her way lay through a land of rocks and streams, where every stone might have borne Raymond's name, and every runlet babbled it, so instinct was it with his memory. The spring-time seemed to mock her with its joy. It was nearly mid-day when the wheels began to rattle over the uneven village street that led to the

Hall gates. The last time they had done so, it was when she fled with her lover on the very eve of her threatened marriage with Rupert. Strange to say, she felt less terror in thus returning alone to brave the malice of her aunt, and the anger of him she had so slighted, than upon that occasion. She had then feared for Raymond, and listened for the clanging hoofs of the pursuer with a sinking heart; but now against him Grace Clyffard had done her worst, which was so bad that even she was glutted with it; while was not Mildred there to be her child's protector—preserver from she knew not what, fellow-guardian with [she knew not whom—and did it not behove her above all things *not* to fear!

The post-chaise had drawn many a fami-

liar face of child and woman to the doors of the hamlet, but the park itself, seen over the sunk fence, appeared unusually destitute of life for such an hour; no keeper with his gun, no labourer with axe in hand about the plantations, no blue-aproned bearer of vegetables from the kitchen-garden, no message-boy loitering on the path that led to the village—no external sign of life, in short, such as is ordinarily visible about a great country Household, was there. The porter at the lodge, too, could not easily be roused; and while she waited, through the gilded iron gates the long avenue shewed strangely desolate. As the cottage-door opened, she drew back mechanically, for she knew the man would start to recognise the face of runaway “Miss Mildred as was;” but

she could hear his well-known voice in expostulation with the post-boy.

“You know, my man, it’s no use your bringing anybody here at this time,” quoth Giles the porter. “Why, can’t you let a poor devil, who scarcely remembers what a night’s rest is like, take a little sleep?”

“It is a lady, and I did not like to tell her,” replied the other in a tone so low that Mildred could scarcely catch the words.

“Nay,” grinned Giles, “but that only makes it worse. The Master will have no such folk within his doors.”

“Ay, but she comes to visit Mistress Clyffard.”

In a moment the gates were thrown back, and through her veil Mildred could see the porter drawn up in the most uncomfortable

of the attitudes of respect, and shading his eyes with his hand, as though the glory of the exalted personage to whom he was doing honour was almost too great to look upon.

The deer, that had been wont to keep at a considerable distance from the avenue, were now feeding close beside it, and cantered nimbly off as the chaise rattled by; while the rooks, more easily moved than of yore, rose in a single cloud from the swinging branches, and like a household roused by night-alarm, inquired of one another hoarsely what was wrong; whereupon some answered "Thieves!" and some cried "Fire!" and others (who seemed half asleep) murmured "Both! Both!" As the visitor drew nearer to the house itself, the peacock on the terrace began to scream;

but Mildred remarked to herself how strange it was that, save the deep bay of the blood-hounds, not a note came from the distant kennel where the foxhounds lay, and from whence such a tumult had been wont of old to issue in the daytime at the echo of hoofs from the courtyard. No sound of human tongue was heard, no cheerful noises such as the morning brings to every dwelling; no human face came to the blinded windows of the upper floors, and those beside the door were shuttered close.

“Is there Death here?” asked Mildred of the post-boy, letting down the glass with a trembling hand, and thinking with agony of a small white face, growing pointed and thin, and cold little hands, which she had not been in time even to put crosswise

over the sinless breast. "Speak, man, and tell me the whole truth."

"Well, ma'am," returned the young fellow, mitigating the Craven dialect for her benefit as well as he was able; "it's what I can't incense you about in a crack, but I'll not lee to ye. The Master, you see, he's odd, and will have nothing done in the daytime. All the folks here gets up at eve, and goes to bed in the morning. It's mackly that they're all asleep, and will give me time to tell the tale before they answer the bell. Some folks hes lile brains, and some's an outshut;* and Mistress Clyffard, she has brains for hersel as well as for Squire Rupert."

"But he must be stark-staring mad," ex-

* An outbuilding, an additional place of stowage for that article.

claimed Mildred involuntarily, "thus habitually to turn night into day."

"You've about hit the sticklebutt, ma'am; but 'mad's' a hard word, and a bad one" (here he looked cautiously around him) "to speak of hereabouts. Besides, we can't be nesh* when there's so much gear going. It would not be wise in the mistress to lock him up like the rest of 'em. Better hev a bairn wi' a mucky faace than wesh its noas off."

"Then this poor gentleman is only suffered to be at large to serve the purposes of another?"

"Nay, ma'am," returned the post-boy apprehensively; "I know nothing mysel—I only tell what I have been told; and if the great folk here should come to learn

* Squeamish.

it, they would tak uncouth* at poor Toby Drayson."

"But what a dreadful hypocrisy, what an acted lie must all things here"—

"Tush, ma'am, dinna flite,"† interrupted the other; "if leeing were choking, thear'd be hard gasping everywhere. And again, I say, speak not o' what I told ye. Ye braad o' me,‡ I see, and have an honest kindly heart, or I should never ha' spoken.—But what name shall I say, for here is somebody coming at last."

"Mrs. Raymond Clyffard."

"Saints and soldiers! What, are ye braad o' *them*? Then I wish I'd never spoken. But folk ses out when ther i' drink; and indeed, indeed, ma'am, I made too free with the liquor this cold morning."

* Take offence.

† Scold.

‡ You are of the same breed, or character, as myself.

“Do not fear,” returned Mildred, smiling. “I am not of their race, although of their name; nor am I and Mrs. Clyffard such friends, although we are relatives.”

“Then, for any sake,” returned the man confidentially, “let us shog back again to Lancaster, while yet we may. Wae worth ye, if ye stay here, and be an unfriend of the mistress. Come; for your kind face, and the trouble in it, I will take ye back, and risk all—ay, though there’s an ill-looking devil on the bridge yonder—I wonder where *he* sprung from?—loitering there for no good, and as much as to say, ‘What we have stolen, that we keep.’ Say the word, and I’ll ride him down like muck. Let him take care of his taahs.”*

“Thank you much,” returned Mildred,

* Toes.

gratefully; "but I have come hither of my own will, and am not afraid to stay here." Nevertheless, as she looked back in the direction indicated by her new friend, and beheld the gaunt form of the man Cator standing upon the narrow way, as though indeed to forbid her egress, she felt that she had need of all her courage.

The next moment the door was opened by Mrs. Clyffard.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK'S REPRIEVE.

“**Y**OU have come at last, niece; I have waited for you long,” said the Lady of Clyffe, letting fall her ice-cold syllables one by one, like drops from a petrifying spring. “If I do not take your hand, it is not because I am not glad to see you.”

Resolute, severe, unbending as ever was Grace Clyffard, in voice and gesture; but her fair features had suffered change. The brow was no longer smooth, and the lithe form had lost its rounded grace. Trouble, and what is worse than trouble, the anxiety

of guilt—the dread solicitude of one who drives a chariot on a city wall, unfenced on either side, and dares not for his life look right or left, but always to his plunging steeds—had worn at last her wondrous youth away. Moreover, she seemed to take no pains to keep it; her attire was loose, and her fine hair unbraided, although it was plain she had not been roused from her bed, as other inhabitants of the Hall had been by this time. And indeed, Grace Clyffard, it was said, now never slept. Perhaps, had Ralph been alive, she would have contrived to retain her marvellous beauty, but now, as though aware it was of little use to her, she neglected it, unwomanly in that, as in all else. A look of scorn which had sat upon her, when she first appeared, faded away as she gazed in Mildred's face, and marked its

calm resolve. Twice had her niece essayed to speak, and twice had failed, but it was easy to observe that her inability did not proceed from fear. Even Tobias Drayson, who was himself by no means free from apprehensions, could see that, as, after lifting the luggage into the hall, he threw into his farewell scrape at the door a more genuine sympathy than could have been expressed from all the bows that Lord Chesterfield ever made in his life.

“Stay one moment,” cried Mildred to this friend of three hours’ standing, who was about to leave her in the keeping of her mortal foe, “there may have been some mistake here after all.—Mrs. Clyffard, where is my child?”

“She is in Lucy Cator’s charge—a ser-

vant new to you, I think, but very faithful. Must you needs see her now?"

"Here, and at once!" returned Mildred resolutely. "I will not stir, except to leave this house, unless I see her; unless I hold her in my hands."

The hideous thought that had already pierced the mother's breast was again at work; she dreaded lest this fiendish woman, keeping her promise to the ear, might presently give to her orphaned arms her Milly—dead.

"Your child is safe and well enough," returned Mrs. Clyffard with a sneer; "this bell will bring her in three minutes. There!" She rang it. "But do not look so haggard, niece, for be sure I did not ask you to Clyffe Hall to play the mourner."

The cruel shaft sped not home; the mo-

ther had no ears save for the sounds she hungered for—the echo of a tiny footfall, and the babble of a baby tongue. Tobias, too, with head aside, awaited them with not a little interest; and presently they came.

“Run, then—run to mamma,” cried a woman’s voice, not unkindly, and then was heard the pompous stagger of an infant’s feet, and the crow that bespeaks pedestrian confidence; and like an arrow from the bow, forth darted Mildred, and caught her child up as it strained, like hound in leash, to meet her from its nurse’s hand, and hugged it to her breast, and kissed and fondled it, and rocked it to and fro, with murmurous inarticulate joy.

No sooner had the first gush of grateful happiness passed away, than her eye glanced

towards the door. It was closed; Tobias was standing by it no longer, and there was a dull sound of wheels.

"It will be better both for you, niece, and for your child," said Mrs. Clyffard, in her sibilant voice, "not to think any more of what I read in your mind just now. You have foiled me once, it is true, but once with *me* is enough."

Mildred trembled.

"You fear," continued Mrs. Clyffard triumphantly, but speaking still so low that not a sound reached the nurse's ear; "you fear, and you are wise. You dare not risk so great a stake as that" (she pointed to the infant clutching in blind love its mother's cheek) "upon a losing game. Mind, I would not have you marry Nephew Rupert."

"*Marry* him!" That was all Mildred

said; but had she cried, "Thou fiend and murderess, with hands yet dripping from my husband's blood, how darest thou speak to me of marriage?" she could not have expressed more hate and loathing, than did her shrinking form, that seemed to fear pollution from the woman's touch, and poison from the very air she breathed in common with her. "*Marry* him!"

"No, niece; that is no longer necessary. But see you speak him fair, and promise what he asks for. There is no harm in humouring a madman. Thanks to you, Rupert has never been himself since when you broke your faith with him and me, and fled—as did your false mother before you—from kith and kin, to link yourself with their sworn enemy. I cannot quench the anger of my eyes the while I speak of it,

but I have forgiven you this, and Rupert has forgotten it. He deems that every morrow is his marriage morn; and therefore, that the night may pass the quicker with him than if, on a sleepless pillow, he lay longing for his gipsy bride, he turns it into day—hunts, shoots, and fishes by moonlight, or by torchlight if there be no moon, and makes the name of the Mad Clyffard a wonder and a jest the country through. And he *is* mad, too; so mad, niece, that if I did but tell him ‘That is Mildred’s child, she that is widow of thy brother,’ he would pluck her from thine arms, and dash her brains out on yonder courtyard stones; and yet the law would hold him harmless. But the law stirs not of itself; and if I have his name set to a certain parchment, written out and ready for his signing more than two years

back, and which he would have signed upon the very day on which he called you his—you ungrateful girl—I say that even now, should he but sign it, there being no greedy heirs to wrangle with me, and dispute my rights, the thing would hold; and all this goodly heritage, on which I have fixed my eyes these many years, and have yearned after as you—weak fool—have yearned after that babe these ten days, shall henceforth be mine—mine—mine!”

Grace Clyffard clasped her hands as though she were invoking a blessing from High Heaven upon her sinful soul. So rapt in greed, that for a moment she forgot the very presence of her niece. Then suddenly she swooped upon her with, “You dare not thwart me, Mildred; you dare not come between me and such a prize! If

loss of all you love—who have already lost so much, and can afford to lose so ill—has terror for you, play me not false again! When will you see Rupert?”

“Alas, Aunt Grace, I fear——”

“When—*when*, I say?” exclaimed the pitiless woman, not stormfully, as the winds beat and the rains fall, but fiercely, as the hailstones rattle and hiss. “To-day, to-morrow? A week hence, if you will have it so; but when once named, see you depart not from the time. I will not brook postponement for an hour.”

“Then I will see him *now*,” quoth Mildred resolutely. “Here, at once: I am ready. Let him come.”

“Fool, would you have him rend you limb from limb, you and the child as well? You know not what you ask. No, nor yet

to-morrow. Those sunken cheeks must be plumped out, those eyes harbour no tears, those mournful garments be exchanged for others befitting one on the threshold of her bridal. A week hence it shall be. You hear me, girl? I do not mince my words; but do you heed? I will not take your silence for consent. Speak—speak, I say. What! you are contumacious?—Lucy, take her child!”

As the woman stepped forward to obey her mistress, Mildred cried with passion, “I hear; I heed. I will do all you ask, if I have still my child; without her, nothing. Rupert and you may rend me limb from limb, as you have said, but I will not be parted from my child!”

“Good,” returned Grace. “For a week, then, you shall have her to yourself; and

after that, if the parchment be but signed, shall take her whither you will; if *not*, then you will not be much together, you and she. Do you understand me, Mildred?"

"Yes, we shall be parted like my husband and myself," returned Mildred hoarsely. "Let me go hence to my chamber; I cannot bear to look upon your wicked face."

"You are no flatterer, niece; but that does not affect me. My presence shall not vex you longer now, nor any more, unless your own conduct calls for it.—Lucy, shew Mrs. Raymond Clyffard to her room; and see you never leave her night nor day, as I have already charged you.—Remember, a week hence, and you meet Rupert Clyffard as his betrothed bride. Have I your word, niece Mildred?"

"You have, Aunt Grace," answered Mildred resolutely.

For is not a "week hence" a precious boon, to be rejected by no human soul in present peril, and least of all by a woman? A very eternity of comfort—a space wherein a score of unlooked-for buds of hope have time to spring up, any one of which may blossom into the flower safety?

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLE JAILER.

LUCY CATOR, the woman who was appointed to be Mildred's attendant, and also her jailer, was one of those persons who are always middle-aged. Like the wicked dwarf in the fairy tales (although she was by no means a dwarf), she looked as though she had been born into the world very grey and wrinkled, and yet with a beady brightness about her eyes that seemed to promise an eternal youth. If it was impossible to imagine her a child, it was equally hard to picture her bowed down

and decrepit with age. Like the horse that we buy at fourteen, and work for six years, and boast (and believe our boast) that he is as young and as strong as ever, Lucy Cator looked capable of doing domestic service for several generations yet to come: the most prudent mother would have hired her to preside over a nursery of young children, with no fear that she would soon (alas, alas, for the poor Human, who has no paddock to take her ease in, and to whom even the knackers afford no happy release, when past work!) become "unequal to the situation." She had been only recently taken into Mrs. Clyffard's service, but she came of a stock upon whom that lady could rely. Her brother William had been year by year establishing himself in the good graces of the Lady of Clyffe, and

since Gideon's death, he had grown to be something more than a servant. She could count upon him to execute projects from the consequences of which Clement shrank in fear; and although he was much wanted at the Dene, where, indeed, her brother could scarcely be induced to stay without him, she had retained him at Clyffe Hall of late for her own reasons.

Much of this Mildred guessed, and on that account, as well as from the odious relation of domestic spy in which she stood to herself, was inclined to regard her new acquaintance with great disfavour. But there was one thing which much mitigated this feeling—Milly was fond of Lucy. With that strange waywardness that belongs to infancy, and which might at times almost lead a mother to imagine that her own child

was a changeling, no sooner had the three arrived in the large chamber allotted to their use, than Milly stretched out her little arms to her new nurse. Lucy stood with her hands by her side, not offering to take her from her natural protector, and still the child struggled towards her, as though it would have said, "Now, let me go to her, now do; for though I am well aware you are my mother, and the person to cling to in the presence of an ogress, such as she who has (I am delighted to see) just taken herself off, yet I do owe this singular-looking female an apology for my apparent desertion of her. You have no idea how civil she has been to me while you have been away; I really must go to her." A flush of wounded pride involuntarily stole upon the mother's cheek; but she stepped

forward, and gave her child to Lucy, saying, "You have been very kind to her, I see; may God reward you for it!"

For an instant the whole face of the grey woman was lit up with pleasure, as suddenly as a gas-jet which one turns the wrong way before one turns it out—then once more it became as hard and wrinkled as a winter's road. "Mrs. Clyffard bade me treat the child with every care, ma'am," returned she coldly. "That was to be one of my chief duties."

"And what is expected of you else," inquired Mildred, her aversion renewed with this reply, "beside this hired care?"

"I am to wait upon yourself, ma'am," returned the other, her face quite buried in the child, who laughed and gurgled at her kisses like the rich wine escaping from the

flask, and babbling of the vintage feast whereof it was the pride a score of years ago.

“That ‘waiting’ means watching, does it not—means playing the spy upon me night and day?”

“You heard what Mrs. Clyffard said, ma’am,” replied the other quietly. She spoke with a humility that disarmed her interlocutor. It could not have been in the letter of her task that she should behave with such respect and gentleness. Besides, what could *she* know of the wrongs that had been suffered at Grace Clyffard’s hands. No! It was manifestly unfair to treat this woman, who was only doing her duty—and that with delicacy and feeling—as one responsible for the actions of her mistress.

“You are right, Lucy, and I am wrong,”

said Mildred. "I ask your pardon for my angry words. If you knew how cruelly I and mine have been treated, you would make allowance for me, I am sure."

Lucy bowed her head, but without speaking.

"I want, however, to know exactly the position in which I am. You are to be my inseparable companion. But am I to be also kept an indoor prisoner?"

"You may walk about the park, wherever you please, madam—that is, if I am with you; but not upon the village side of it, or in the avenue."

"Your orders are precise enough," said Mildred bitterly. "Now tell me—I have a foolish fancy for visiting Ribble Cave to-morrow—do they preclude it?"

“No, madam, they do not.”

It was well for Mildred that as this answer came her face was turned away from her whom she addressed, for at those words her features changed from shrinking pale suspense to the full rose of exultation. Nor was it at once that she could trust herself, to yoke her rapturous thought with sober words.

“Lucy! I do not know if you have ever loved and lost, as I have done; but if so, when I tell you in that cave fell the first whisper of love upon my ear from lips that now are dumb, you will understand the prayer I am about to make to you to grant it; if not, perchance because I am of your own sex and friendless, you will indulge me in what is at worst a harmless whim. I wish to visit

Ribble Cave *alone*. To me and to my child, that place is hallowed; you would not surely break in upon your sister at the altar-steps, and marr her prayers?"

The woman's face melted at this appeal like snow before the sun, then froze again as quickly as before.

"There is no outlet to the cave, save one," continued Mildred; "and therefore you will not neglect your duty by remaining at the entrance; you will have us both secure."

Lucy shook her head. "Let us talk of something else, madam, if we must needs talk; but you cannot but be weary with your long night's travel. Here is refreshment, and when you have taken it, lie down upon your bed and sleep, as all at Clyffe are sleeping now."

"Not until you have promised what I asked," pleaded Mildred passionately. "It is a small thing perhaps in your eyes; but in mine—ah, you cannot guess what value I set upon it! Come, promise me, and I shall sleep in peace."

"No, madam, I cannot," said Lucy gravely: "your very earnestness forbids me to say 'yes.' You will *not* be safe without my presence. From Ribble Cave there is an outlet besides the one of which you speak."

So flushed was Mildred with her recent joy, that she did not guess the woman's meaning, notwithstanding her grave tone, for the heart, when hopeful, is as disinclined as childhood's self to contemplate the dreadful void of death. "What outlet, Lucy?" Then when she did not answer: "Do you

think that I would drown myself, and so escape? Having just found my child, would leave her motherless once more? Or drown her also; whereby her innocent soul would flee to heaven, while my own would suffer Separation from her—keenest pang of Hell—for ever? Do you think *that*, Lucy?”

“I did think so, dear madam; but I do not now. I see that I may promise what you ask with safety. Now, pray, eat a little and then to bed.”

“I cannot eat, good Lucy; I am too happy. This child is precious food to me, and also satisfies my soul with rest; but I will lay me down that you may sleep. What doors are these, for I do not know this room?”

“The nearest is the one by which we

entered, opening upon the little gallery that runs by Mrs. Clyffard's chamber; and this upon the stairs that leads to the Clock Tower and the Western Postern."

"But is not that a third door beside your bed-head?"

"Yes, madam, and locked on the inside, as all the others are. It leads like the first."

"But not immediately?" said Mildred with apprehension. "There must be a room between."

"There is a bed-room, madam."

"And is it occupied? Who sleeps there?"

"My brother, madam—William Cator."

In her new-found child, in the seeming kindness of her attendant, and in the budding of a secret hope that was to bloom

upon the morrow, Mildred had almost forgotten that she was a prisoner; but at the hated name of that unscrupulous servant of the Carrs, she awoke at once, as from a baseless dream, to the full consciousness of her unprotected state, and of the dangers that were threatening her. "Give me the keys, and let me put them beneath my pillow, woman!" cried she harshly. Then obstinately refusing to unrobe, she lay down outside the bed-clothes, clutching her child to her bosom, while her sleepless eyes wandered from door to door.

Hour after hour went by in perfect silence, save for the singing of the birds, which had not as yet conformed themselves to the inverted habits of Clyffe Hall, ere Lucy's deep-drawn breathing convinced Mildred that her jailer was asleep. Milly had

long been rapt in soundest slumber. If she could only rise without awakening either, and reach the postern with her precious charge, while yet no human creature was astir!—once in the village, she would be safe enough, or what seemed safe by comparison with such a neighbour as this woman's brother. The postern had no lock, she knew, but only bar and chain, which she could unfasten. Softly she arose with key in hand, and keeping her eyes fixed upon Lucy, opened the second door without noise, then lifting up the sleeping child, stole forth as silent as a ghost, and flitted down the stair.

Not five minutes had elapsed, ere she returned, and pale and cautious as before, stole into bed again with beating heart. In her hand she held a slip of paper, which she

had found, newly fastened—for the wafer was still wet—upon the postern.

“On your life, do not open this door. You will escape, swete lady, but not by such means. I am watching over you. Having had faith in me thus far, is it worth while to mistrust me now?”

“YOUR WELL-WISHER AS BEFORE.

“Destroy this note at once.”

This Mildred read and re-read until every word was hers; then tore the paper into a thousand fragments, and placed it in her bosom. Like a charm, it stilled its throbbings; and presently the healer Sleep drew down her eyelids with his viewless hand, and smoothed the care from off her troubled face.

CHAPTER IV.

A BROKEN NIGHT.

NOT until the Weary fall asleep and wake again after an insufficient amount of repose, are they fully conscious of the extremity of their past fatigue. Ere they give way to sleep, it seems to them that they are tired, but not exhausted; but when something arouses them after a few hours, then they know, by harsh evidence, how near their overtasked strength must have been to collapse. The muscles are stiff, the limbs powerless, the eyelids heavy as lead, the brain torpid, and only with pain and

difficulty quickened to thought. Our whole being piteously, and yet drowsily, demands to be let alone in that antechamber alike of Death and Life—Repose—a little longer. “A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.” When, under such circumstances, some importunate sound compels our reluctant attention, we are long before we can trace it to its true origin; and before we wake, it sometimes suggests dreams in which we seem to live a lifetime. Thus Mildred Clyffard, dead to every sense save that her lost child was folded in her arms, lay, dreamless as the dead, for hours, and then began to know that she was prisoner in an enchanted castle, ruled over by the wicked and malignant Grace, assisted by certain evil demons—Gideon Carr to wit, and Clement, and Wil-

liam Cator; but yet she had friends outside, and, in particular, Lieutenant Carey (always in complete armour, and upon a milk-white steed), who was encamped (by himself) without the walls, and passing his time very agreeably, as it seemed, in summoning the garrison by blast of trumpet to surrender to his clemency. Nor was the garrison backward in the trumpeting business (without which, by-the-bye, it is the opinion of the present writer that the Chivalric Period of this world's history would have ceased much sooner than it did), but sounded onsets, and recalls, parleys, fanfaronades, &c., with neat finish and admirable execution. Poor Mildred's prescient spirit sighed for the extension of Mr. Bass's bill to shalms and trumpets, but still the brazen clamour continued until it fairly

woke her. It was deep night, but through the windows, which looked down on the courtyard, flashed a lurid glare.

“Fire!” was the sudden thought that dragged her by the strong arm of terror from the bed, and made her put aside the blind with hasty fingers, encumbered by her babe. A strange sight met her gaze. The space was thronged with men and horses, shewn by the light of flaring pine-torches; the strife of tongues, the clang of spurs and hoofs, filled the dark air with weird unnatural din; and while she looked, the hounds came trotting from their kennel, and the crack of whips broke forth, and then again the sharp short summons of the horn.

“Do not be alarmed, dear madam,” cried Lucy from her bed; “the master is only

setting forth to hunt. I suppose it seems strange enough to you, though we at Clyffe are getting quite used to turning Night into Day."

Strange, yes, strange indeed, for though the sights and sounds were in themselves not unfamiliar to Mildred, she scarcely recognised them under the changed circumstances. It almost seemed as though these persons were engaged in some unhallowed rite, some impious attempt to turn God's gift of darkness from its proper use and purpose. In such a parody of the blessed morn, appeared something sacrilegious; so ill did the borrowed light depict the dawn; so dissonant the noises that strove in vain to wake the sleeping world. The air was dumb that should have been alive with Nature's waking sounds, though what sounds

were made, she echoed like one wonder-stricken; so that the noise and clangour of the scene itself were ceaseless, although islanded in a boundless sea of silence; and though the torches flared and blazed, and every hoof drew fire from the stone, a mighty belt of darkness encompassed all.

“And is this scene enacted every night?” asked Mildred, half to herself.

“Yes, madam, every night, far into spring, and long after the other pack at Kendal has ceased to hunt. At first, the novelty of the thing attracted many folk; but now the master hunts alone, save for his own people. Wet or dry is all the same to him, and even for frost he cares not. I am told that it is a grewsome sight to see his reckless riding—he that was once

such a bookworm, and averse to all out-door sports, until——”

“Alas, can this be he,” interrupted Mildred pitifully, “who mounts the black horse—it is Raymond’s own *Black Diamond*—at the Hall steps? Why, he moves like an old man; they almost lift him into the saddle. How worn and thin he looks, and how deadly pale!”

“Ay, madam, and so he always looks, except, they say, when he is at the full gallop, ahead of all the field, and thinks himself alone; then some that have been near him say he cries out dreadful things, threats against this and that man, and even against my mistress—or breaks into mad songs; while over his face there comes a look exactly like what his great-great-grand sire, Guy, wears—that is his picture as used to hang

in the gallery—him, you know, as leaped into Hell Gates; and, what seems stranger still, he takes a pleasure in that awful spot, and places like it, which lead Heaven knows whither. Three nights ago, he made *Black Diamond* take the stone wall into Pot-hole Field, where never man on horse dared go before, and galloped in and out among the chasms, until William seized his bridle, and led him out by force.”

“I thank your brother for that deed,” cried Mildred fervently, “if for naught else. All are moving off, and yet I do not see him. Why is he not there now to see his master does not come to harm?”

“He serves Mrs. Clyffard, madam, not Mr. Rupert, unless by her command, and perhaps she has ordered it otherwise.”

“I forgot,” returned Mildred coldly. “Is

it her pleasure that we arise now like the rest of the household, or wait for morning?"

"You will please yourself, madam; but the child has always kept its usual hours since it has been in my charge, and if you do not mind the loneliness—for the days are very long and lone here——"

"By no means," interrupted Mildred bitterly; "the faces are few indeed at Clyffe whose absence I shall mourn.—Nay, do not cry, my darling, my sweet Milly. Let us to bed again, and try once more to forget our sorrows."

"The child is hungry, madam," observed Lucy in the same deprecating tone which she had so often used before; "I have food for her in the cupboard, if you please let me rise and give it her." Not waiting for an answer, she got up, and

striking a light—for the last glimmer of the torches of the receding hunt had by this time faded away—set milk and bread upon the table. “Will you not take something yourself, dear madam?” entreated she respectfully. “I have meat and wine here which are not poisoned. For your child’s sake, you should not starve yourself.”

“Are you friend or foe?” inquired Mildred searchingly. “If not a friend, I beseech you do not mock me with this lip-service. Stay—now tell me”—she took the woman by the arm, and scanned her face —“are you my Wellwisher?”

Not a feature changed, not a ray of intelligence gave token that the allusion was understood. In the simplest tone she answered, “Yes, madam, indeed I am. Why should I not be so?” Then suddenly

perceiving the key, which Mildred in her agitation had left in the door leading to the postern, she cried with fervency, "Heaven be praised that you are here alive! You have opened yonder door. It may be you are a sleep-walker, so I will take the key; but, O madam, beware of what you do. Be sure you never venture forth in daylight without me by your side. At earliest morn, they set the blood-hound loose—Red Rufus—who is so terrible to strangers."

"But I did not meet a blood-hound when I came hither."

"No, madam," answered Lucy, with hesitation, and hanging down her head; "it was loosed afterwards, and it is always so to be; I heard my mistress say so."

"That is a prison, indeed, from which it

is death to attempt to flee!" exclaimed Mildred vehemently. "Has this lady whom you serve, then, the right to issue a warrant for my execution?"

"Your Aunt Grace charged me, remember, not to leave you, madam, night or day, and with me you are safe; and the child, thank Heaven, is safe, for I myself took her to Rufus, and the huge hound licked her baby hand in love, which having done, he is her friend for ever."

"Thanks for that, Lucy," quoth Mildred, shuddering still at the peril to which she had so nearly exposed herself. "I will not strive to free myself again; I will trust to God alone and such help as He may send me; and I will trust in you, Lucy, although you promise nothing, for I do think you wish me well."

Then Mildred ate a little, and presently disrobed, and once more laid her weary head upon the pillow, and slept so soundly, that she never heard the Night Hunt coming home across the echoing bridge, nor woke again till it was broad bright day.

CHAPTER V.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

HOW unchanging are fair Nature's features ! Time, which destroys all *our* poor beauty, does but heighten hers ; while even the torch of War, which lays the homestead waste and kindles into ruin all that Man has built, or sown, or planted, leaves her scarcely scathed, and swift to repair damage, covering the bloodiest grave with green. Crime, and Wrong, and Woe affect her nothing. She supplies this life's stage with matchless scenes, let the actors play what they will, and smiles upon the direst

tragedies as on the peacefulest domestic dramas. Never did spring morning dawn more brightly, or broaden on into a more glorious day, than that which on the morrow bade in vain the inmates of Clyffe Hall rise from their shameful sleep, and smote Grace Clyffard's pillowed but unrestful face with unaccustomed blushes. Eden itself, be sure, was not less fair after the Fall, than when it pleased the innocent eyes of our first Parents; and Ribble towered as nobly in the sky, and flashed its hundred streams as bright and purely as though no curse, nor Carr, had ever vexed the house of Clyffard.

"How well you love old Ribble, madam!" said Lucy Cator, as Mildred's eyes devoured the glorious hill as the three crossed the park.

“Ay, that I do,” replied she with eager passion; then added, less warmly, “look how the cloud-berry dyes its very crown, as though the sunrise lingered there! How beautiful it is!”

“Yes, madam, but very cruel. Its boggy fells have smooored poor folk before now; and others have spent weary years in jail for hunting on its slopes the wild red deer, before the Clyffards built them in.”

“Do you remember that, Lucy?”

“Ay, that I do, madam; and when the tenants hereabouts—of whom my father once was one, before the evil days came on us—were all called ‘foresters,’ and sworn to cherish and preserve the vert and venison. It was an old-world place in those days, with old-world customs, such as you have never heard of. We were very simple

folk. There was not such a thing as a timepiece in all Clyffe, save that in the Clock Tower of the Hall, and the young master's hunting-watch which struck the hours. Poor Mr. Cyril, how well I mind his showing me that toy! As for glasses to tell the weather—yon mountain was the only glass we had:

‘ If Ribble’s head do wear a hood,
Be sure the day will ne’er hold good ’—

that was all we knew about the weather.”

“But if the Cators are Clyffe people, how is it that they came to serve the Carrs?”

“Well,” returned Lucy hesitatingly, “they thought, I suppose, to better themselves. Besides, we didn’t occupy the place here we had been used to, and for poor people it was not so pleasant to live hereabouts.

You may talk of law, but in those days, what the Clyffard said was law, nay, what his steward or bailiff even chose to say: if a man trod on either side the public way that cuts the park, some forester would take him by the collar, and beat him like a dog. Look there, at yonder gentleman before us, loitering by the beck—some wandering artist, I suppose, by his portfolio. Well, in the times I speak of— But here Rufus comes. There is no fear, madam. He always runs to us thus to bid ‘good morning.’”

“Take the child,” cried Mildred. “There is fear, I say. The dog is angry—furious.”

“By Heaven, and so he is!” exclaimed Lucy. “He is tracking some one, but not us. Alas! it is that wretched man. He

will tear his life out." Then, raising her voice to its full pitch, she cried, "Flee—flee up-stream, and hide!"

The person addressed was too far off to catch her words, although the sound attracted him. But he looked up and saw the dog, whose dreadful errand it was not difficult to understand. With nose to ground, the mighty creature came on at headlong speed, now swerving this way, now the other, as the careless footsteps of the man had loitered devious, but never stopping for one instant.

"Flee, for your life!" screamed the two women with one voice; and the man turned and fled, but not up-stream. A little wading in the water, and then one of the numerous hollows in the waveworn rock would have concealed him safely, at all

events, until Lucy could have come up and calmed the beast; but instead of that, he climbed the eastern bank, and made for the boundary-wall of the deer park. Up to that time, a hoarse deep bay had ever and anon broken like a knell upon the women's ears; but the instant that the man shewed himself, the dog was dumb, and ran straight as arrow from the bow.

A terrible cry escaped from Mildred's lips, and she covered her eyes with her hand.

"The man runs very fast," said Lucy comfortingly: "it is possible that he may yet reach the wall first, and that Rufus cannot leap it."

"But if he does?" moaned Mildred.

"Then Heaven have mercy on the poor doomed wretch!" answered Lucy fervently.

“He is not one of the Clyffe people—a stranger seeking the cave, perhaps, without a guide—and the brute will——But he nears the wall. With what strength and speed the fear of death has winged him! He climbs it, and the dog springs after him, but fails and falls; and now he springs again. Alas, he has dragged himself to the very summit, and——O my God!”

“What, what? I dare not look, Lucy. I charge you, tell me what has happened?”

“A miracle!” cried Lucy joyfully. “A moment ago, and I should have replied, ‘A murder.’ The dog comes back again: he must have known the man, although *I* know him not, who, as I thought, knew everybody hereabouts. See, he comes this way,

gambolling like a puppy: he is joyful, because he has found a friend, and one, too, who has authority to bid him come and go. I should not have deemed that any man save William, and the poor master himself, could have had such power over Rufus."

With red tongue lolling low, wide jaws, and chest all flecked with foam, the huge beast thundered up; but his eyes were no longer aflame, nor each hair of his russet coat bristling as before with brutish hate and lust of combat. Lucy patted his vast head, bent low before her; then gave him Mildred's hand to kiss, in token of fealty.

"Now you are friends," quoth she; "you need never fear him more.—But who was that old acquaintance, Rufus, you have just

parted from? I protest that I am somewhat curious to see him. But if—for you look very pale, madam—this scene has been too much for you, let us go home, and postpone your visit to the cave, which, indeed, you now may not find solitary. I cannot think what could have brought the man hither, unless to see it; for the gate is as often left unlocked as locked.”

“Thank you, good Lucy, but I must do as I have purposed,” returned Mildred resolutely: “I feel better now.”

Nevertheless, she henceforth moved with trembling, and scarce could hold her little one, as she stooped to pluck the wild-flowers by the way—the early orchis, the pale blue violet (as great a prize to her as though it were not scentless), and the white sorrel, striped with blue; or strove

to clasp the golden saxifrage (almost as vain a task as to rob the butterfly's wings of their rich bloom), and babbled of all the glory of the spring in her unknown tongue. Above the entrance of the cave itself, the snow-white bird-cherry drooped like a knight's plume; while in front, nature had spread a carpet of forget-me-nots.

"How fitly these grow here!" said Mildred with swimming eyes. "Will you wait for us, good Lucy, and wait patiently? This torch"—taking one from the heap which always lay within the antechamber—"will last me for two hours and more."

"I will wait, madam," returned the other. "I will trust your word not to rob yourself of God's good gift of life: you know not—indeed, you know not, lady—how much

of happiness it even yet may have in store for you."

Mildred's voice faltered as she answered, "That is true, good Lucy; and you will never repent this day, I think."

She stooped down, for she was taller than the other, and kissed her cheek, which was like a shrivelled apple, that had, however, retained its ruddy hue. Then, having lit the torch with flint and steel, she took her way with her astonished babe into the heart of Ribble, with expectations higher than had filled the soul even of him who was the first to explore its hidden glories; for where was treasure of Earth or Fairyland that could compare with that she well knew lay hid in the cathedral chamber—whence from the darkness, with a joyful cry, sprang forth her own brave husband—her Raymond,

loved as only those are loved who have
been lost, mourned as the unreturning dead
alone are mourned; but Found, and Hers
once more!

CHAPTER VI.

BURIED IN THE CHALK.

WHEN Gideon Carr last looked down upon his victim from the Beacon Cliff, he saw him, as he thought, within a few seconds of death; and when, his attention being called elsewhere an instant, he no longer beheld him clinging to the bare white wall, he naturally imagined that he had fallen sheer upon the beach beneath. Such would have been the case with nineteen out of twenty men in a strait like that of Raymond Clyffard's; but years of voluntary hardship, such as sportsmen use,

had made his sinews lithe and strong as steel; and running (where no horse could gallop) on the craggy fells in chase of the hill-fox, had made his limbs as supple as any bird-catcher's, who gains his bread at peril of his neck; and leaping from rock to rock, in many a foaming beck, to cheer his hounds upon the otter, had given him eye as true as his who, on the slender rope, appears to totter, only to deceive the gaping crowd below him. And though as brave as any who drew breath, Raymond abhorred to die, and longed to live; and even in that extremity, held on with his manly soul to Hope, as to the cliff with his strong fingers, and took his measures with cool brain upon the very brink of what seemed sure destruction.

I have said that on his right hand lay

a sort of gutter, down which, indeed, most persons would have shot at once, but which to him, as he clung panting to the precipice, seemed to offer some salient points, some coignes of vantage, or, at all events, a preferable position to that which he at present occupied, exposed to any action of his mortal foe, a touch with whose walking-stick or finger-tip must needs have been his instant death-doom.

He was by no means so exhausted, or at least so near to utter collapse, as he seemed; and taking advantage of Gideon's momentary glance aside, he slid down along this almost perpendicular track as slowly as feet and hands could serve him to arrest the force of gravity. At last—that is, after such a second of time as might count against a year of ordinary life—he found that

he had stopped himself. Above him hung the frowning brow of the precipice, under which his sideways course had brought him, so that he was quite hidden from his enemy's sight. He had just possessed himself of that fact, when, from the depths below, came up the innumerable flocks of sea-fowl, as though to resent his intrusion into their almost ærial domains. The touch of a passing wing would have set him falling, like another Lucifer, through space: their hideous and unexpected din, which even alarmed his murderer, standing on the solid earth, shook his very soul within him, and closing his eyes, he waited for a moment, as though for the stroke of doom. Upon the sloping ledge on which he lay, never before had any creature bigger than a bird found foothold; a few more inches, and it

terminated, as Raymond found out afterwards, without a rim, a crack, a nodosity—smooth, as though a carpenter's plane had levelled it. If he had known it then, even *his* iron nerves might have given way, or proved unequal to the task that lay before him. But when he dared to take his eyes from the slope to which he clung with foot and finger, he steadily turned them to the cliff alone, notwithstanding that there seemed some devil within him that prompted him to glance into the unfathomable gulf below, and so to perish. Then he perceived upon his right hand, and so close that he could touch it had he dared to move, a hollow in the chalk, large enough to contain his body, and which seemed to widen with its depth. To the *mens sana*, reasoning in its arm-chair, or indeed to any person who

possessed the advantage of level ground, his getting into this hole would have seemed merely the exchange of a speedy death for one equally certain, although more lingering; but to *him*, stretched on that ledge of death, it appeared (so comparative is the estimate of what is good) a very haven of security—a consummation scarcely to be hoped for, so intense was his desire to attain it. Yes, that five-foot orifice in the otherwise unbroken wall of white seemed to him like the gate of heaven.

Slowly as a snail creeps, writhingly as a worm crawls, and trailing his whole body along the ground, like one in pain, Raymond dragged himself inch by inch into the hole. Then brain and muscle failed together, and he lay for a little like one dead—to all appearance as though he had

fallen indeed through many a fathom of space upon that pebbly beach. When consciousness returned, he found himself in an excavation of considerable extent, the roof of which was sufficiently high to permit him to stand upright. From this dark recess the broad blue shewed brighter, and the sparkling sea seemed to smile more joyously, than Raymond had ever seen them; the sea-birds' screams, which had not as yet by any means subsided, had now a note of gratulation for his ear; and thankfully his throbbing brow welcomed the clear breezes, the very softest of which had whispered to him but a few minutes back of Death. Then with the sense of present safety arose new fears, new needs. How was it possible that he should ever escape from such a prison? It was most unusual,

he well knew, for vessels of any kind to venture close in-shore among the rocks and islets; and even if they did so, how was he to draw attention to himself in such a strange and unlooked-for place of durance?

Moreover, if even he should make people aware of his being in such a predicament, by what means could he be extricated? Long before they could dig down to him through the solid rock, he would assuredly perish of hunger, unless the guillemots and gulls should bring him food, as the ravens nourished the prophet of old. As for any human creature coming to his assistance by the way he came, or as to himself attempting to escape by the same road, his brain reeled at the very thought of such a chance: he could see now the

full extent of the peril to which he had been so lately exposed, and having seen it, his whole being revolted at the idea of tempting destruction a second time in the like manner. What he had heard of the wondrous agility of the bird-catchers in these parts did indeed cross his mind, but he well knew how the rock above him overhung his place of refuge, and felt, with a sinking of his noble heart, that even to those human spiders he was inaccessible.

What, however, most occupied Raymond's thoughts, and racked him with anxiety, was how to attract the attention of his fellow-creatures, not for his own sake, but that Mildred and her child might be warned in time of the murderous design of Gideon Carr. To foresee misfortune falling over

our dearest ones, and to be powerless to avert it—there is no anguish bites like that! It is the very nightmare of reality—a curse that only falls, on most of us, thank Heaven, in dreams. How should he let her know her danger? Should he pencil it out a score of times upon the backs of certain letters that he happened to have with him, and trust them, like the Sibyl's leaves, to the winds, in hopes that one at least might flutter to the hand of a friend? Alas, the wind was blowing from off-shore, and forbade even that promiseless project. Or should he enclose a letter in the case of his hunting-watch, and drop it on the beach below, on the chance of its attracting the attention of some passer-by?—where neither pleasure nor business brought a human creature from one month's

end to another! Sick at heart with the conviction of the futility of any such schemes, Raymond turned wearily away from the mocking sunshine, and sought the gloom of the interior of the cave.

As he did so, it struck him for the first time how strange it was that there were no sea-birds, nor any traces of them, in a place so much better adapted for their purposes than the precarious ledges all about him, which were swarming with eggs and callow young. What could have kept out such tenants from so convenient an abode? No animal inimical to their kind could harbour in such a position, while eyrie of hawk or kestrel it certainly was not. His third footstep struck against something soft, which he carried with some difficulty, though without resistance, to the

light, when this riddle in natural history received its solution.

The reason why the guillemots avoided the cave was, because it was the occasional resort of Man, or, at all events, bore tokens of his presence. What Raymond had dragged forth was a huge bundle neatly packed in sailcloth, and containing a large quantity of foreign lace. Half a dozen similar packages were arranged in a semicircle, at the far end of the cavern, along with two or three bales of rich and handsome shawls. These costly articles were not very useful to Raymond in his present position, except that, collectively, they formed a by no means despicable bed. Their chief value to him lay in the fact that they needs must have a mortal owner, who had probably some mechanical means of com-

municating with his property. It would have been a speculation of considerable importance to Raymond had his own interest been alone at stake, as to when this communication took place, with respect to his bodily sustenance—for meat and drink are at least as much necessities of life as Brussels lace and French shawls—but his anxiety concerning his wife and child swallowed up all other cares. Again and again, as he grew accustomed to the semi-darkness of his retreat, he minutely examined the walls and roof in search of some means of egress, by which he could make his way to Pampas Cottage, first to protect his dear ones, and then to avenge them; but all was solid chalk. Remembering, too, how far beneath the surface the cave was situated, and, in particular, how liable to observation any open-

ing needs must be, made at the very top of the Beacon Down, he became satisfied that nothing of the sort existed. Secrecy was evidently the main consideration with those who stored their goods in such a place as that in which Raymond now found himself; nor had he any doubt but that he was in a hiding-place of the Freetraders, as they called themselves, persons in advance of their age, whom the less favoured part of the community stigmatised as smugglers. It was likely enough that some of his Sandby friends were part-owners of these very goods, which, indeed, were far too valuable to belong to any one individual. This, however (as it seemed to Raymond at the time), was a matter of very secondary consequence. Shawls and lace might belong to the breakers of the law or not;

all that concerned him was that those who claimed to be the owners might send to fetch them—although by what means he could not so much as guess—ere the dreadful morrow upon which hung the fate of Mildred and the child.

But the curtain of night descended slowly upon a sailless sea, and the hours of darkness wearily wore on without a sound, save the monotonous murmur of the wave, and the shrill scream of the herring-gull and the kittiwake.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAUCY SALL.

WITH the first dawn of morning, Raymond swept the sea with a little spy-glass, which he had put into his pocket the previous day for the use of Mr. Stevens: there was one stately vessel visible that had just started upon the broad highway of the Atlantic for the Western World; but the instrument which told him that much, by shewing him the streaming stars and stripes, could bring the ship no nearer, save to his vision! The wind had partially lulled which had hurried the clouds in

flocks athwart the moon all night, and the huge three-master made but little way. It was agony to the captive to watch her lessening hull, her masts dwindling inch by inch to a mere stick of canvas, then sinking altogether out of sight; and yet he well knew that though he had caught sight of her from the first, she could not have come within distance, by a mile, for any signal of his to be discerned, far less attended to.

A few hours later, but still very early in the morning, the Preventive boat from Marmouth passed on its way to Lucky Bay; but it, too, gave the outlying rocks and reefs so wide a berth, that all his signs and cries were unavailing. He had made bold to strip one of the precious bales of its sailcloth covering, to flutter flag-wise

at the mouth of the cave; but at the distance which the cutter kept, it could have shewn no larger than an albatross's wing. Moreover, unlike one placed upon the Down, or even on the beach, he was in a position where no mortal would think of looking for a human creature, or of taking any sign as made by man. Foot by foot, the cutter slowly drew away, for the wind was not in her favour, and tacked and tacked, though never near the shore, till presently the headland cut her off. Neither food nor drink had Raymond taken for twelve hours, yet the fever of his blood ran high; and like a wild beast in his lair, he paced his narrow prison, feeling desire for nothing save to be free. The day drew on, and with it drew the fatal time when Gideon was to put his

murderous design into execution. The tide was almost at its lowest, which was the only period at which the Mermaid Cavern could be reached, and which Raymond himself had bidden his wife remember, appointing as it were with his own breath the hour of her doom.

He was about to lose the beloved partner of his life, the wife of his youth, still beautiful as a bride, the mother of his innocent child—nay, and that helpless child herself as well—at the hands of one already a murderer in intent, and whom neither beauty nor helplessness would move a hair's-breadth from his cruel purpose. Thoughts like these would have been enough to drive some men mad in a like position, or to tempt them to end such mental agony by one leap forth into the viewless air; but

not so Raymond. If he could not save, he might still live to be avenged. Sooner or later, surely he would escape from his living grave; then, wifeless, childless, he would track the wretch who had made him desolate—ay, though the pursuit should lead him half round the world; and then, face to face, the victim risen from the tomb to confront his murderer—then, for a few brief minutes, he would taste of that nearest approach to Joy which would then be left to him—Revenge! Foot to foot, hand to hand—and, better, without a weapon, for so the thing would last the longer—how he would woo that ruffian to the combat, and bear him backwards with tardy but relentless force, and squeeze the life out of his lying throat by slow degrees! He should come twice to life again, and

die three times: once for himself, in payment for the time when Gideon mocked him in the very jaws of seeming death; and once—the husband's breath came quick and short the while he thought upon it—once for Mildred; and once again for the child; and then his dark soul should wing its way to hell. Raymond Clyffard's veins swelled into knots, and his fingers dug into the flesh of his clenched hands the while he thought upon his great revenge. He had never been so near the fate of his race before, as when he brooded over that grim picture; the curse of the Clyffards almost came upon him. But as though he had felt that it was nigh, and knew that if it fell he would be powerless for the work of retribution, he beat it back as it were by force, and compelled his mind into other

channels. He made it count the puffins as they stood in single file upon the ledges beneath, and mark how often the green-eyed haggard cormorant dived within the hour, and how long remained before he emerged from under water with draggled wing.

Towards noon, something occurred, however, which of itself demanded his attention. The little revenue-cutter once more rounded the point upon its return-voyage to Marmouth. He forgot at the moment the arrangement which had been made by Lieutenant Carey for the transportation of Stevens to Mermaid Bay, and it was with a great cry of fury that through his glass he discerned the form, although not the features of his enemy. The boat this time seemed coming in quite close to shore, so

near that his signals could not fail to be observed, and Raymond's heart had begun to beat with hope as well as passion, when suddenly her course was turned to seaward, and she made for the outlying pillar of chalk which was called the Dutchman. This change of tack at first originated in a natural disinclination on the part of Gideon Carr to approach the scene of his yesterday's crime, where the tide might by chance have left some ghastly evidence of it, or even the white cliff presented some damning stain; but as he continued to scan the spot through the boatswain's glass, he caught sight of Raymond's signal, which for the moment struck icy terror to his soul, and produced the change which we have already described to have occurred in him; and finding the boatswain importunate

for the possession of the glass, he purposely dropped it into the sea, although even through it, it is doubtful whether any other eye but his own could have perceived that which had so moved him. Nay, after a little thought, Gideon almost convinced himself that what he imagined he had beheld was merely the effect of morbid fancy; and as the cutter drew further and further from the land, so his wicked conscience grew less disturbed.

Then came the incident of Walter Dickson's craft being seen running close in-shore towards Sandby, and at once all his fears returned. If, by any miracle, Raymond Clyffard was really yet alive, and what he had seen had indeed been a signal of his supposed victim, intended as a demand for help, those on board the smuggling vessel

could not fail presently to see it; hence Mr. Stevens's passionate attempt to induce the crew of the revenue-cutter to arrest Dickson's course. We know that that appeal was futile, and how the cutter kept on her way, and carried Gideon Carr to his righteous doom in Mermaid Bay; but Raymond only knew that so far, at least, the murderer's plans had been successful, and that probably within that very hour both wife and child would perish through his cursed guile, choked by the pitiless tide. No mental torture could have been contrived by tyrant of old more poignant than that he was doomed to feel when he beheld in the far distance the cutter with its hateful burden at last standing in for the land. Scarcely, however, had he done so, when what should come swirling round the eastern

promontory, through a passage, thought to be somewhat dangerous, between the mainland and a cluster of outlying fragments of it called the "Stark," but the lugger of Mr. Walter Dickson, so close to the cliffs that one who stood upon the Beacon Down might have almost tossed a biscuit on to her slanting deck. On she came, noiseless and swift as a white phantom, steered by Mr. Dickson himself, who, with half-shut eyes, lay dreamily in the stern-sheets, as though his slender craft were in no more danger than if she were coasting upon Ullswater."

"They're allus out upon some fool's errand or other," observed young Richard Brock, who, with two others, made up the crew of the lugger, in continuation of some remarks called forth by their meeting with

the revenue-boat. "If they had been off Mermaid Bay three nights ago, instead of now, they might ha' done a good stroke o' business."

"They would not have got it cheap, whatever they got," answered his father from the bow-thwarts, removing his pipe from his mouth in order to give due emphasis to an imprecation. "Fifteen hundred pound-worth of shawls and laces—— Where the devil are you steering us to, Walter? *Port*, man, *port*, or we shall be on *Gull's Castle*!" And, indeed, so near to the outlying chalk-rock of that name did the lugger pass, that as the old seaman gave his warning, he also kicked off his shoes in readiness for a swim.

"Look, mate, look!" cried Walter Dickson, scarcely conscious of the danger they

had so narrowly escaped; "there's somebody in *Martin's Nest*."

The sensation which this exclamation produced upon the crew of the lugger was most extraordinary; they did not indeed start from their seats, as landsmen would have done, but each uttered a hasty ejaculation of wrath and wonder, as his looks followed the direction of the steerman's eyes to where Raymond could be plainly seen fluttering his signal, and gesticulating with the utmost vehemence. He was calling to them, too, at the top of his voice, and adjuring them to return at once to Mermaid Bay, and save his wife and child; but the distance was too great and the wind too violent to suffer them to catch a word he said, although they guessed

by his motions that he was endeavouring to make himself heard.

“Who is it?” cried old Will Brock savagely. “What cursed fool can have risked going there in daylight, and without leave or licence, too, from those who have the best right to give it?”

“It ain’t one of our folks at all,” answered his son, shading his eyes with his hands, as he scanned the shining cliff; “it’s Mr. Raymond Hepburn, of the Cottage.”

“The worse for him,” muttered the old man furiously. “Is there not a gun in the boat? Pass it here, boy. I am going to shoot a razor-bill—that is all.”

“No, no; none of that,” interposed Dickson; “we should only make bad worse by anything of that sort.”

“Fifteen hundred pound-worth of shawls

and laces," exclaimed the other with passion; "the best run I ever made in my life; and all that you and I and the rest of us have in the world! Are you going to risk all that, Walter Dickson, for a friend of them blasted blue-jackets? Give me the gun, I say."

"No, Will; you shall not do murder—or rather attempt it, for that fowling-piece would not carry half the distance. 'Tis clear that this man has not been seen by anybody as yet, or he would not be playing such frantic tricks yonder, in order to let us know he was there. How he ever got into *Martin's Nest*, I know not; but he is evidently alone. We have only him to deal with in the matter, and if we can keep him quiet"—

"There is only one way that makes all

safe," interrupted the old man gloomily.

"Why, he will get half that's there for merely saying it is there."

"Nay, nay; Mr. Hepburn is a gentleman, and his wife has been good to my old woman," answered Dickson warmly; "and you have been my mate, Will, for these thirty years, and one of whom I should be sorry to have to say, 'That man was hanged for murder.' I have as large a stake in yonder goods as any man here, and should be equally loath to lose it, but there is blood enough on that Beacon Cliff already."

"Only a coast-guardsmen," muttered one of the crew who had not yet spoken.

"Very true, Elliot," returned Dickson quietly; "although, let me tell you, it does not become one of your stock to talk

like that. In the heat of a fight, one may chance to get blood upon one's hands, and hardly know how it came there. But pushing folks over precipices—ay, you may frown and swear, too, for all I care—or shooting them in cold blood, while they're asking us for help, like this one—such things are not to my taste, nor do I believe that good can come of them.”

“Then what do you propose to do, Master Clear-conscience?” inquired Brock sullenly. “Is Lieutenant Carey and his friend, this Mr. Hepburn, to go shares together in our property?”

A hoarse murmur of rage and dissatisfaction came from the throats of the two sailors, who had themselves no little interest in the proceeds of the late “run,” and whom this reference to the intimacy be-

tween the commander of the coast-guard and the present subject of conversation excited to fury.

"I will go bail that no one here suffers any loss," replied Walter Dickson resolutely. "The *Saucy Sall* is worth something, and I have a little money at bank, which, in case of the worst, shall be at your service. There—does that suit you, mates?"

All reluctantly allowed that under these circumstances, so far as they were concerned, they had certainly no further right to complain, but, at the same time, they avowed their disinclination to accept so generous an offer.

"No, no," said Brock, with a gleam of kindly feeling in his hard grey eyes; "we ain't a-going to cut our cable from you, old fellow. We're in a heavy sea; but if

we pull together with a will, we may perhaps keep our shirt-collars dry yet."

"That's well said, mate," answered Dickson cheerily. "Now, my plan is this—to get one of our people to visit the *Martin's Nest* this very night. If I was as lissom as I used to be"—

"*I* will go," interrupted young Richard Brock sententiously. "There will be moon enough for that."

"You're a good fellow," replied Dickson, with much heartiness; "and your father is proud of you, for all that he looks like a cormorant who has just dropped a fish. You shall visit the poor gentleman, my lad, and explain matters. It will be hard upon him as well upon us, we may be sure; but you must make him see the necessity of being a prisoner for some time

to come at least, and more than that, of his remaining quiet, so that nobody but ourselves may know where he is. If the *Martin's Nest* was discovered, even without its golden eggs, it would be a heavy blow to the Good Cause."

"Ay, that it would," murmured the crew as with one voice, but no longer with peevish sullenness; for their confidence in Walter Dickson was great; and now that a little time had been allowed for reflection, even old Will Brock confessed to himself that his friend's counsel had been wiser than his own, as well as more humane.

Throughout the period of this conversation, the lugger had been making short tacks in front of the Beacon Cliff, since it would have been dangerous to bring her up in such an anchorage; as for landing, it was

not to be thought of at that place; nor if it could have been done, would it have availed for any intercourse between the crew and Raymond, so great was even yet the force of the wind, and the distance between the beach and his place of captivity. *He* could indeed have communicated with them (through the medium, as already suggested, of something written and enclosed in the cover of his hunting watch), but, of course, they had no cause to suspect the urgent necessity of the case, and were unwilling to risk the peril of a disembarkation, from which, as it seemed to them, no good could possibly come. In a few minutes more, the unhappy man, whose hopes for the rescue of his wife and child had been lately so flattered, had the misery to read their fate (as he had every reason to fear) in a few

ill-spelled words, printed with chalk upon a board, and held over the side of the lugger:

“Be Pashent: Help will come to nite. But ON YOUR LIFE do not shew yourself again, or make any more signals.”

Then, in spite of his reiterated attempts by voice and gesture to reverse this fatal sentence, the head of the *Saucy Sall* was turned towards Sandby; and in a few more minutes the sea was once more sailless, and Raymond watching the cruel foam come crawling in, and listening to the long-drawn hiss of the rising tide with a heart robbed of its last hope.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE MARTIN'S NEST WAS DISCOVERED.

ONCE more the pale Moon rose upon Raymond Clyffard in his captivity, and this time it looked down upon him pitifully, with scarce an intervening cloud; tipped with her rays, each tiny wavelet (for the wind had dropped) broke into silver smiles; the sapphire sea, like one great jewel, sparkled icily from marge to marge. But the captive had no eye for its beauty; it would have been the same to him had inky darkness overspread the scene. Whatever canvas Nature might have displayed, he

would only have seen upon it the picture of a little home, emptied of all its happiness by one remorseless hand. His mind was sorely usurped by utter wretchedness: the sense of desolation reigned supreme; even Revenge stirred not now within him. His long fast had doubtless combined with his late anxieties thus to prostrate him; but one who had seen Raymond thirty-six hours before, as he stood upon Beacon Down, radiant with health and vigour, would scarcely have recognised him, as with woe-begone face and lack-lustre eye, he sat within his solitary prison. It was nearly midnight, but he felt no desire for sleep; and yet so occupied were his thoughts, that he could hardly be said to be a waking, conscious man. As he saw nothing, so he heard nothing of what was passing around

him. It was only when a huge object suddenly darkened the mouth of the cave, and then retired, leaving it light again, that he became conscious that he was not alone—that there was a human being swinging to and fro in front of the *Martin's Nest*, now touching the threshold with his feet, and now leaping out again into space, so as to gain a greater impetus, and thereby penetrate still further upon his return. “Can you not shorten matters, sir,” cried this human spider, “by catching hold of me presently?” The voice of his fellow-creature acted upon Raymond like a restorative; he leaped up from his costly couch of shawls and laces in time to seize his visitor at the very next swing of the pendulum, and retain him in his grasp. “Hold tight, sir,” cried Richard Brock, for

he it was who presented himself under these very peculiar circumstances. "You have no idea (however anxious you may be to leave the *Martin's Nest*) how a body wants to get out of it which has entered after *this* fashion. But what's the matter with you, sir, beside hunger and want of room?"

"Can you tell me any news of my wife?" gasped Raymond. "Tell me the worst at once, man; is she alive or dead?"

"Lor bless you, sir, alive and well—why not? I saw her this very evening."

"God be praised!" cried Raymond, fervently, wringing the man's hand who had brought him such blessed tidings. "And is my child safe too?"

Richard hesitated a little.

"What! has that devil Stevens drowned my child?"

"No, no, sir. Don't call names. The man you speak of is drowned hisself, poor wretch—held by a stone-crab in the Mermaid Cavern, until the tide came up and—— Well, that's a strange thing to be thanking Heaven for, unless, maybe, you are thinking that the chap was a coast-guardsman, which, it seems, he was not, after all."

"He was a murderer in thought, if not in deed," returned Raymond, sternly, "as I will tell you."

"All in good time, sir," observed the young man, cheerily; "but first you take this bread and meat, and let the brandy in that flask fetch up a little colour into your cheek. You must be main hungry, so use your teeth and rest your tongue while I take the eggs here out of the *Martin's*

Nest." With these words, the young man began fastening two of the bales to the rope of three-inch cow-hide which had brought him, a hundred feet of which, at least, besides what he had himself required for his descent, were in the hands of his friends upon the Down above. "Now, do not fear but I shall return for the rest," cried he; "and when I have cleared all these goods, I will still come back and keep you company."

"But why not take me with you instead of the bales?" inquired Raymond, with whom good news and a few morsels of food had already worked wonders, and who felt quite equal to any peril or exertion the object of which should be to set him on *terra firma*.

"I will tell you that presently, and every-

thing else it concerns you to know, Mr. Hepburn; but duty first, say I (unless it's revenue duty), and pleasure afterwards; so here goes." With that the young man stepped into the air with his burden as calmly as a tide-waiter would step from deck to quay, and keeping himself off the rock with his nimble feet, was rapidly hauled up to the summit of the Down above. Then again descending, and being caught by Raymond as before, he took away more bales, and so on till the cave was bare. "You do not think I will desert you, Mr. Hepburn?" said the young man, frankly, as he started with his last freight, and Raymond was watching his movements with wistful eyes.

"No, Richard, I do not. I can easily understand why I am not to see how those bundles of"—

“Gulls’ feathers,” interrupted the young man, smiling; “we cliff-fowlers make our living by collecting them, you know.”

True to his promise, Richard Brock once more descended, bringing with him this time some rugs and blankets, as well as a further supply of provisions. At sight of these, Raymond looked by no means grateful.

“What!” cried he, “am I to stay in this place another night?”

“Ay, sir, and another, and another, I fear, although no longer than I can help, I promise you. If I had been the sole owner of what was here just now, you should be free at once, for I know that I could trust to your honour, and besides, I owe your good lady a kind turn for what she did to my Phœbe in her sickness. But there are others who are deeply concerned

in the matter—it's the best run we have had this many a year, and everything must be got well away before we risk letting you out. Even then—I'm speaking what others say, sir, and not my own thoughts—even then, you would do us a mort of mischief by telling about the *Martin's Nest*. It is the best place for stowage along the coast; and all the better for the little mischance as happened to poor Price down yonder. The blue jackets think the place uncanny, and shirk their night-watches upon the beacon in consequence. There's Walter Dickson up there now, holding on to this rope as quietly as though he was not sitting upon the beat of the coast-guardsmen; though, indeed, if one should come, he has his answer ready: If one likes to go bird-fowling by night instead of by

day, what's that to the custom-house? They will never trust themselves at a rope's end to see what I'm about—of that I'm certain. And, by-the-bye, Mr. Hepburn, how, in the name of the devil—for is he not called The Prince of the Powers of the Air in Holy Writ?—did you yourself chance to come here?"

"I climbed down by yonder ledge," quoth Raymond coolly.

"What! without a rope?" exclaimed the other with a perceptible shudder: "that is not humanly possible!"

"Yet by that means, and no other, did I come hither, Richard, although not of my own freewill, as you shall hear." Then Raymond narrated all the circumstances (so far as consisted with his assumed name of Hepburn) which had brought him into his

present inconvenient plight. To the details of the attempted murder, his companion listened with not a little excitement and indignation; but in the description of the means by which the *Martin's Nest* had at last been reached, his interest was manifested even still more keenly.

“You are the king of us all, sir!” exclaimed the cliff-fowler enthusiastically, when the tale was told. “There is not a man in Sandby who could have got here from the cliff-top as you did; no, nor ever was one, I believe, even when Walter Dickson was young. He it was, sir, who first discovered this place, and that in a very curious manner—one which I should have thought could scarcely have been equalled for strangeness, if I had not heard your story.”

“And how was that?” inquired Raymond: not that he much cared to know, but because he began to feel a great repugnance in being left alone, and desired to retain his present companion with him as long as possible.”

“Well, sir, it was when Dickson was quite a boy, about sixteen or so, and when Sandby was not so full of folk as it is now: there were scarcely any cliff-fowlers then, for there was a better trade than bird-nesting to take to, and all hands were wanted for it, so that the gulls had an easy life of it to what they have now, and were only plagued by the boys. Dickson and my father were playmates at that time, as they’re workmates now, and have been so these thirty years and more; always together, shrimpin’ and fishin’, or risking their

necks about the cliffs with letting one another down by a bit of rope such as nobody but madcaps like them would have trusted themselves to. One day, while knocking about in a coble, which, I believe, had been pronounced unseaworthy by the rightful owner—in the Beacon Bay here—Dickson spies out this dark hole.

“‘What a lot of gulls’ nests there ought to be in there!’ says he.

“‘What a lot there *are*!’ cries my father, whom I have heard tell this story about a hundred and forty times. ‘What a lot there are, for I can see ’em.’

“‘I wish we could get at ’em,’ continues Dickson.

“‘What’s the good o’ wishin’?’ answers my father. ‘Don’t you see how the cliff

hangs over? You might as well wish to get at the moon.'

" 'No, mate,' returns Dickson gravely, 'because you ain't got nowhere above the moon where you can stick a stake in with a rope tied round it, and lower yourself down hand over hand; let alone any standpoint such as yonder Down, where a chap one could depend upon—like you, Brock—might stand and hold the rope, and shift it properly.'

" 'You ain't a-goin' to try that, mate?' says my father firmly, 'nor anythink so fool-hardy.'

" 'No, I'm not a-goin to try it; I'm a-goin' to do it,' returned Walter Dickson. 'Why, think what must be in that 'ere hole, mate, in which never a fowler has yet put his fingers, I'll be bound; what fea-

thers and skins, and oil and eggs! Why, I doubt whether even that last run, which your father (that's *my* grandfather, Mr. Hepburn) is never tired of talking about, will ha' brought more grist to the mill. Only, not a word about it to any soul, mind. They'd make us promise not to try it; or, perhaps, it 'ud put it into somebody else's head to do the very same thing before us.'

" 'You needn't be a bit afraid of that last, boy,' answers my father grimly enough; 'and as for the first, I am not one to blab and spoil sport; and if you're fixed upon it, why, I'm your man for anything. Only, you'll never use this rotten old cord for such a place as yon, where you'll have to swing right under——'

" 'No,' replies Dickson, interrupting him

sharp; 'I'm not a fool, although you chose, just now, to call me one.'

" 'I said "fool-hardy,"' replied my father positively, 'and I say it again.'

" 'Well, we'll see what you say to-morrow, when you haul me up from yonder hole—under the eave of the Down though it be, and for all the world like a *martin's nest*—with my pockets full of fulmars. As for the rope, Lucy Pritchard' (and here my father says Dickson blushed, for Lucy was the young girl as he was courting then, and whom he afterwards married), 'will lend me that fine one which was her mother's only marriage portion, and has never been any good to her, because she has no son. Lucy has often begged me, if I must needs go fowling, to use that rope, and so I'll do it to-morrow, and to some purpose; and as for

the stake, if you do not choose to hold me, lad, I will borrow an iron bar of the blacksmith; so you may please yourself.'

"But when the morrow came, and found Walter Dickson on the Beacon Down, William Brock was there likewise; and when the other, who was too proud to ask his help, since it was not offered, had thrust the bar into the earth, and fixed the rope, then says my father, 'And do you suppose as I'm goin' to let you risk your neck alone, mate? No, man, no. You and I are a-goin' to see this ere *martin's nest* together; and if we miss it, why, even then we shall not be parted.'

"Then Walter and he shook hands, for they was very fond of one another as boys, as they are now, although they has their tiffs. 'Just as you like,' says he: 'the

rope is strong enough for ten such as we, and the bar won't break.'

"Then, instead of tying the hide round their bodies—as I and all sensible cliff-fowlers do—these mad boys lowered themselves slowly down, merely holding it in their hands; and work enough they had, when they got opposite this place, to swing themselves into it, as you may guess, when there was nobody within to help them in as you helped me. Moreover, my father says that the birds flew out upon them in hundreds—just as in the big print we've got stuck up at home of the opening of the doors of the Ark—and beat them with their wings, not that the poor timorous creatures showed any fight, but by reason of their excessive numbers. At last the two boys swung themselves sufficiently far within

to obtain foothold, and my father instantly began to lay his hands on all with life that had not yet flown away. 'Quick, quick!' exclaimed he; and Dickson, seeing how much he needed help, and what great spoil there was, ran towards him eagerly.

"The next instant both cried out together, 'The rope!' 'The rope!' But the recollection of it came too late! My father had forgotten it at first, and now in his excitement Walter also let it go. So there it swung, now near, now far, but already too far to be reached, and coming with every swing less and less near. At last it hung quite still, about five feet or so beyond the entrance; and it will give you some notion of the extraordinary feat that you, sir, have accomplished in arriving here, that neither of the boys, though cliff-fowlers born, dared

venture out upon yonder sloping ledge, and so approach the rope by your own road. If they had done so, however, it would even then have been beyond their reach.

“They were as completely trapped as any guillemot they had ever caught in springe. It might be days, as they well knew, before anybody discovered the bar upon the Down above, and if that happened, he who found it would probably draw up the rope, and finding nothing, would conceive that he who had left it there must needs have fallen into the sea. It was quite impossible to make their voices heard upon the cliff-top, and the *Martin’s Nest* was unknown to all except themselves. Their only hope, like yours, lay in attracting the notice of some one on ship-board; but they had no large sail-cloth, such as you found here—nothing except their own

clothes, which could not be seen save at a very little distance.

“The two boys looked at one another ruefully enough, each thinking of his home and friends, but Walter of his Lucy also, and of how she would reproach herself for having been the innocent means of his destruction, through lending him that fatal rope.

“Dickson was the first to speak. ‘Robert,’ said he, ‘we are in a bad plight enough, and if matters are to be mended, we must mend them ourselves. It is no use waiting here to be starved to death, or to be so weakened by hunger that we can do nothing that requires strength and courage. One of us must jump out at that rope, and take our chance of catching hold of it!’

“My father says he never felt his blood run so cold in all his life, as when he

heard these words. But nevertheless he clearly saw the necessity of what the other proposed. 'I am ready, Walter,' says he simply; 'and I think I am the lissomer of the two, and had better try first.'

"'Not so,' says Dickson; 'I brought you into this peril, and I must get you out of it. If I miss it, then it will be time enough for you to take *your* chance; and God send you better fortune!'

"'Thank *you*, mate,' replies my father sturdily; 'but I'd rather die like a brave man, than survive you upon such terms as those. We'll jump together, if you please, but you won't jump before me; that's certain.'

"'As for jumping together,' says Walter Dickson very vexed, 'that would only be another name for falling together; but since I

know what a cruel obstinate chap you are, I'll consent to draw lots. Now, look you, here are two feathers, a black and a white ; see I put my hands behind me, and if you guess which feather I hold in my right hand, then you shall jump first ; if *not* '——

“ ‘No, no,’ interrupted my father sharply ; ‘I won't trust you, Walter ; your heart is too kind to be honest in a matter like this. I myself will throw the feathers into the air, and whichever passes the ledge first, shall decide the question. If the black one falls the quicker, *I* jump ; if the white one, you.’

“ ‘So be it, Will, if you will have it so,’ returned Dickson.

“The air was very calm and still that day, and the feathers were a long time descending from the height to which my father

threw them. The two boys watched them with straining eyes, now poise, now quiver, now slowly sink, now caught in little eddies, until at last they reached the ledge, the white one first.'

" 'I am glad of that,' said Dickson quietly, 'for otherwise I should have jumped from where I stand, and it is better to have a run.—Look here, Robert; I don't want to blubber about such things now, when all depends upon clear sight, but if I—if I miss the rope, and you get home again all right, as I trust you will, you'll give my love to mother, and father, and Lucy, and tell them——But there, that's enough. God bless you, mate, if we don't happen to meet again just yet. Stand clear, there; one, two, three!'

"As he said these words, he leapt out

at the rope with a great spring, and my father hid his face; nor did he look up again, nor know what was happening—being in a sort of swoon like—until he felt Walter Dickson fastening the hide about his waist, and bidding him cheer up and fill his pockets.—And that's the true story of how the *Martin's Nest* was first found out."

"And he that was the brave boy you speak of—Walter Dickson—is now awaiting you upon the Down above us, is he?"

"The very man, sir, and as brave as ever, only a good deal stiffer in the joints. Nevertheless he would have visited you here himself, if nobody else could have been got to do it; for Mrs. Hepburn has been very good to his old woman—she that was Lucy Pritchard once, and who owns this rope, which is the same I have been talking of

all this time—as she was to my own poor Phœbe in the fever.”

“Then being both so brave and grateful,” pleaded Raymond, “will you not trust my honour not to betray the secret of the *Martin’s Nest*?”

“Ay, that we would, sir, if the matter concerned us only. But we have passed our word to keep you prisoner here till the goods removed this night have been disposed of, and that will take some time.”

“At least you will let my poor wife know that I am safe; or else, when I do not return to-morrow, she is sure to think I have come to grievous harm.”

“Well, sir,” answered the young man frankly, “we will do our best, Dickson and I; but no woman has ever yet been let into this secret, any more than if it was

the Freemason's. I dare not trust it even to Phœbe. However, you may depend upon us two, sir. Do not fret, and I shall be with you again to-morrow night at furthest."

"And you will have seen my wife and child?" said Raymond.

"I hope so," answered the young man evasively; for he knew that Milly had been carried away, although he thought it better not to harrow the father's heart by such sad news, while thus compelled to inaction and captivity. But he kept his promise, and so worked upon his father with the help of Dickson, that the old man at last gave permission that Mrs. Hepburn should be informed, under a strict oath of secrecy, that her husband was alive and in safe hands. It was this glad news which

Walter Dickson came to impart that evening when he found Mrs. Carey at Pampas Cottage, and the revelation of which sent Mildred back, as we have seen, from the bedside of his "old woman," with such a lightened heart. Upon the other hand, through their prisoner, the free-traders became cognizant of the villainy of the man called Stevens, and exhibited it, with reference to the burial of his body, in the manner described. Still, they were much averse to set Raymond free, fearing that the secret must needs ooze out if they did so, and jealous of his intimacy with the people at Lucky Bay. Mildred and her husband, however, were permitted to correspond by letter—subject to a Sir James Graham's inspection of the correspondence—and it was with Raymond's full consent

that Mrs. Hepburn undertook the expedition to Clyffe Hall in search of her lost Milly. The smugglers, too, were not displeased at an opportunity of giving the captive his liberty, which also insured his absence from the neighbourhood ; so a few hours after Mildred's departure, his faithful friend and visitor, young Richard Brock, swung himself as usual into Raymond's (by this time tolerably furnished) lodgings, with the long-wished-for information that the rope was ready to carry double.

So Raymond had followed his wife, post-haste, to Clyffe, and now met her, as they had agreed upon, in the heart of Ribble, for the first time since Gideon Carr had striven so hard to part them for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

MET TO PART.

“**B**UT what is it you propose to do at Clyffe, love?” asked Mildred of her husband, when he had finished narrating his strange experiences of the last few days, and had received her own in turn. “Why should we not at once depart, now that we have our Milly safe and well? I cannot bear a second separation from you, Ray—indeed, indeed, I cannot—and yet I feel that that is what you have in your mind.”

“We will not be separated, dearest,”

answered Raymond, smoothing her dark tresses with his loving hand. "I will be near you to watch over you; you will meet me here every day. But I have a duty to perform in my father's house, which I have too long neglected; I must protect the helpless, and I must punish the guilty."

Very stern and grave was Raymond's voice as he spoke these words, and Mildred trembled to hear it, because she knew what iron resolve that tone expressed. Her husband, so simple, so generous, so open, was about to match himself against the wily Grace.

"Yes," continued he, "I have been selfishly content with my own lot too long. I have suffered my father's son, my only brother, to remain in wicked hands—flat-

tered by false hopes, terrified by false fears—and have never lifted finger to set him free from a captivity worse than that from which I have myself but now escaped. True, I have not wronged him; but when I look upon you, my own, my love, I feel pity for him who coveted such a priceless treasure in vain.”

“Raymond,” answered Mildred hastily, “you do not know how sadly Rupert is changed.”

“Yes, dear, I know it. The Curse has fallen—alas, poor Rue, poor Rue!” Raymond turned away his face, and was silent for a little, ere he resumed. “I must act *for* him, therefore, and not *with* him, as I had hoped to do. For some base purpose of her own, this woman, who would imprison him at the Dene, without a scruple,

seeks to make him appear sane. In a few days, I can collect evidence hereabouts to prove him otherwise. Then he will be removed from her and hers, and put in some fit place, and receive careful tendance, from which may come—who knows? improvement, cure.”

Mildred shook her head.

“At all events,” continued her husband, “he shall remain no more with one who only uses him for her own ends. With her, too—a murderess in intention—I have my own account to settle. This letter, in her own handwriting—‘*When you have made sure of R.,*’ writes she—was found on the dead body of her brother. I will tell her this to her false face, ‘That were it not that she was once my father’s wife’”——

“No, no,” cried Mildred passionately; “defy her not, dear husband; let her be. You will fall into her toils yourself.”

“I must take my chance of that, wife,” answered Raymond cheerfully; “but since you fear this woman thus, Mildred, I will remove you at once from out of her reach. With the Careys, you and the child will be safe alike from force or fraud; and when my work here is finished”——

“No, Raymond,” cried Mildred firmly. “If we are to be parted from you, I should feel safer here, in the very hold of our enemy, than in any place where, as before, she might suddenly swoop down upon us. The expectation of the peril would be worse than the peril itself. With you without, and our unknown friend,

whoever that may be, within, I shall not feel unprotected; besides, for a week at least I am safe, for until then I shall not have served this woman's turn."

"Moreover," answered Raymond, "within a week I shall have obtained all that I need in the way of information, as well, I hope, as struck a blow at this evil woman, who is even now, as I have cause to suspect, bringing her base designs to some completion. Nay, do not tremble, my sweet love. How strange it is that you, who are so brave against all else, should be such a coward with respect to Grace Clyf-fard!"

"I do not fear, dear Raymond—indeed, indeed I do not for myself, no, nor yet for Milly; while she is in my arms, at least, she seems to be safe, and knowing that I

have her to guard, I meet my aunt as the sheep-dog meets the wolf: but it is for *you*, Raymond, for you I tremble."

"You doubt that I have wits to cope with cunning Grace," returned Raymond smiling. "Well, that is true enough. Still, there is something of advantage in a honest cause, and something, too, in this—that the woman deems me dead. She that plays tricks with shrouds, and acts the sacrilegious part of a lost spirit, may yet not be without her own superstitions, Mildred."

"Then why be seen?" urged Mildred. "If you trust for anything to Grace's ignorance—and oh! beware how you build on *that* foundation—why shew yourself, and run the risk of being recognised? Would Aunt Grace easily credit that it is your *ghost* which haunts the place, or would it

not rather put her on her guard to sift the truth of the story of your death?"

"You are wise and prudent, dear Mildred; but you do not remember that I left Clyffe a smooth-faced boy, having scarcely used a razor till I` married, while, since I have been imprisoned under Beacon Down, I have become bearded like the pard. Moreover, in the daytime, no one is stirring now about the park, whether from the Hall or the village; and when evening comes, I retire to the *Spotted Cow*, beyond the turnpike, where, in return for looking over the contents of my portfolio, the guidman and his wife entertain me with the country gossip, and all the history of the poor mad squire. They would as soon think of finding a likeness for me to the cow upon their signboard as to Raymond Clyffard."

“Why, the very dog Rufus knew you ; and *I* knew you, Raymond”——

“Yes, the dog and you,” interrupted her husband, smiling upon her fondly, “for love and instinct are equally lynx-eyed ; but trust me, no one else shall recognise me. And now, dearest, for the present, we must part, lest this attendant of yours become impatient, or even grow suspicious. You see that it is I that am the prudent one. Every day at this same time I shall be within this chamber, having always *Finis Hall* to take to, if any ferret should invade the burrow. If you do not come, I shall conclude you cannot. In the meantime, do not fear. Within the week, or in less time, I hope to discover enough to put a spoke in Madame Clyffard’s wheel, that shall mar the smoothness of its running.”

With dire forebodings, which, however, she did not express, Mildred held up her child to meet its father's kiss; then turned towards him her own obedient cheek, unstained by tear, and made him loving farewell. Darker and darker grew his form with every footstep that she took with torch in hand, and once she could not forbear from running back and kissing him once more; but at last she tore herself away, and hurried forth to Lucy.

"I am afraid I have been very selfish, and made you wait very long," said Mildred sweetly.

"It did not seem so, madam, I assure you," replied her attendant. "It is my duty to wait your pleasure; and besides, my brother here has kept me company."

William Cator, who was standing a little

behind his sister, leaning upon a gun, regarded his mistress's truant niece with no very friendly eyes. "I am afraid I frightened you, miss—that is, madam," said he gruffly.

"Yes," returned Mildred with a steady voice, "I am always frightened at firearms. Please to carry it carefully as we go back."

"I ain't a-going back, ma'am," replied the other with an unpleasant grin. "There's nothing to do at the Hall, and I can't sleep in the sunlight like the other folks; so I'm out for a day's pleasure."

"What is your brother going to shoot?" asked Mildred, with a beating heart, of Lucy as they recrossed the park.

"Oh, nothing as I knows of, madam; he is no sportsman. He was waiting for

you to leave the cave, because he wants to go in there himself to fire the gun off, and try the effect of the echoes. I wonder whether we shall hear them."

CHAPTER X.

RUPERT'S MAGIC MIRROR.

THE week which Grace Clyffard had meted to her niece as the interval of rest before her day of trial, and that which Raymond also had assigned as the period necessary for the completion of his own designs, had slowly worn away. Every day Mildred had been comforted by meeting with her husband, yet every day cast down by finding him so bent on punishing his wily stepmother. As though, in executing the sacred task of an Avenger, he felt removed from human ills, he seemed to

see no dangers in his path, no matter how obvious they might be; and when they were pointed out, made light of them. True, he said, Cator *had* suddenly come upon him in the cave. What then? The man had scarcely ever seen him in his life; was it likely he should identify a wandering artist, who had let his torch burn out in his enthusiastic admiration of the Cathedral Chamber, with dead Raymond Clyffard?

“But he must have known that you and I were here together,” urged Mildred anxiously.

“Yes; but I assured him that, worn out by a long ramble over Ribble, I had been asleep for hours on this yielding sand. The fellow was quite satisfied, I do assure you, love.”

Mildred was far from satisfied: but there was something of impatience in her husband's tone she had never observed before, which cautioned her not to dispute the matter. She had that faculty of knowing where contradiction is hopeless, and argument worse than injudicious, which, in a woman, is so rare. This submission to her husband's opinion begat in time (as it will always do, if, O wives of England, you would only try it!) a certain confidence in it.

Matters went on upon the fifth night at Clyffe, and stagnated during the fifth day, precisely the same as they had done at first; Lucy continued to be respectful, and even kind; and Mrs. Clyffard, according to promise, kept herself so completely out of her niece's sight, that Mildred lost that sense

of insecurity which had taken such complete possession of her upon her arrival, and even began to think that nothing after all might happen worse than had already taken place, until the hour of her release came round. She had taken one of the old books from the library, and contrived by its help to pass a weary hour or two. It was a tale written in imitation of those of the Round Table, about errant knights and captive ladies, and perhaps she found some application in it to her own case, which lent an interest it would not have otherwise possessed. At all events, it so far won her attention as to make her put a slip of paper in the volume over-night to mark her place, and on the morrow after breakfast, she turned to it with some curiosity to see how Sir Eglamour or Sir

Bedevire acquitted himself under certain circumstances. As she opened the book, she perceived that the paper which she had left therein was no longer blank, but scrawled over by the nameless friend whose handwriting was now become so familiar to her.

The hour which you dread draws nigh, but do not fear it. Rupert Clyffard awaits you in the rose-garden, but I shall be there too. It is better to go forth at once and meet him, than that your aunt should send you forth. You must get the paper signed according to her wish. Leave your child within doors, and do not refer to your marriage, if you love your life.

Like some condemned wretch, who, having striven since his sentence to forget his in-

exorable doom, is suddenly reminded of it when there is not an hour left that he can call his own, so Mildred shivered and sank down in hopeless terror. Why had she lingered in that dreadful house, when escape had so often offered itself? Why cherished the foolish notion that what Grace Clyffard had once designed would not be carried out? Why have promised, no matter in what straits, to play this evil and false part with Raymond's brother? Her husband, indeed, had not said "Nay," but only because he thought to have by this time rendered such an interview unnecessary. Nay, the week was not yet out. It was the morrow which her pitiless aunt had appointed for this dreadful interview. Why, therefore, should she meet Rupert now? Who knew what help or

change the next day and night might bring forth? But yet her unknown Well-wisher, whom she had no cause to doubt, advised her to see her brother-in-law at once. And was it not well thus to anticipate the commands of Mrs. Clyffard at a time when, for all Grace knew, Milly was still clasped in her mother's arms?

The windows of the library looked upon the terrace only; but opening one of them, and putting out her head, she could catch sight of the rose-garden, or rather, for it was a sunk square, of any person who chanced to be walking in it. Yes, Rupert Clyffard was there, in the hunting costume he had worn the previous night, walking rapidly to and fro, and cutting at the leafless plants with his whip-lash. He had evidently not been to bed at all. His face,

even at that distance, shewed as though he had not known rest for weeks; and always as his hasty steps brought him to the end of his restricted walk, he looked up anxiously towards a window which she felt was that which had wont to be her own. He was evidently keeping an appointment, as he thought, with some one who had not yet come. Then it came into her mind that he had made some such appointment with herself in that very place the day previous to her elopement with his brother. Mildred hurried back to her own chamber, and muttering something of having left her book behind her, put the child into Lucy's arms, and then returned alone. She well knew that without Milly she would never be suspected by her attendant of any attempt to leave the castle.

Rupert was still there, but walking faster and faster, like some poor pent-up animal in its narrow cage. Mildred dared not look again, lest her resolution should give way, but hurried to the western postern, and let herself out. With a firm step, though with a beating heart, she walked along the terrace towards Rupert; but he did not hear her. She would not have used that way had she dwelt in her old room, and therefore he did not look for her in that direction. She had time to observe him thoroughly as he crossed and recrossed the little square. The last time she had beheld him, he had but lately recovered from a long and dangerous illness, but he had then been healthful and well-looking by contrast with his present appearance. His cheeks had fallen

in, and were ghastly pale; his thin fair moustache, all unkempt and straggling, hung like hoar frost upon his lip; his hair was white as snow. There was nothing about him of youth or beauty left. But his eyes burned like living coals—so fiercely that Mildred involuntarily stopped as she caught sight of their strange fire. At that moment, he turned and saw her. With a joyful cry, he took the few stone steps that led up from the rose-garden at a single bound, and stood beside her on the terrace.

“At last, at last!” he cried triumphantly. “Ah, Heaven, how I have wearied for you!” He seized her hand; then, as if controlling himself by a strong effort, raised it respectfully to his lips. “You are not yet mine,” said he; “I kissed you the

other day, and you were angry. That makes me sad, as it pains you, my dearest, to see *me* wrathful. I was wroth just now because you did not come. I thought they kept you from me—She, or They; and that turns my blood to flame. Your own aunt, too, your own mother's sister, else—— But there, I am not angry now. I am so happy, Mildred, that all seems like Spring.”

“It is Spring, Rupert.”

“Ay, true; Spring with *us*, dearest, and with all fond lovers, although to the world who are neither wooed nor wooers, it is still Winter. Is it to-day, or to-morrow, that we two marry? See, I have gathered you a posy. Sweets to the sweet, they say. Now, give me one rose back again, that I may put it in my button-hole; or, since it

has no blossom, into my bosom. That is where the true roses bud and bloom. But I do not like those black clothes, my darling. Why do you wear them?" Such a chill crept over Mildred at these words as numbed her brain; until that moment, the thought of her being in widow's weeds had never struck her. Fortunately, Rupert answered for her. "It is not fit," he said, "to mourn the dead so long. My father was an old man, too, and old men must expect death; it is the young who shrink from the grim mower. Your aunt Grace, poor thing, is likely to die early."

"Indeed, Rupert. Why so?"

"Well, that is between you and me and the terrace-wall here. Or, stay; come here into the yew-tree arbour. I will then tell you some news: I will forecast the future.

We shall be one to-day or to-morrow; and man and wife should have no secrets. And, by-the-bye, talking of that, I dreamed last night—of all the dreadful dreams—that *you* were married, and to whom, think you? To whom?" They had crossed the rose-garden, and stood in the huge arbour, enclosed in thick and close walls of yew. The madman held her at arm's-length, and griped her hard, but not in anger; he gazed upon her shrinking face with a good-natured smile, as one who asks a riddle. "I knew you would never guess," cried he at last; "for who would ever think of Raymond? And yet, I dreamed that you were Raymond's wife, not mine; and when I woke—now, listen, for this is what I have brought you here for—I saw my own brother's face—— What's that?"

In an instant, the grave and solemn look with which he had spoken the last few words was replaced by one of keen suspicion, then again by one of mocking mirth.

“Ha, ha, my friend; what! you are listening are you?” Like a boy that plays at hide-and-seek, he ran out of the arbour, and searched it round and round. “Did you not hear a twig snap, Mildred?” inquired he.

“No, Rupert.”

But in the brief space that he had been absent, she had heard something else—a whisper from she knew not whom, and coming from she knew not whence, which said, “Fear not; you are not alone. Hide your wedding-ring.”

“You heard nothing, Mildred? Good.

Your ears are trustworthy, whereas *I* hear so many things; voices in the night-air, and at all times our wedding-bells. They give me the headache, dearest; yet, if I heard them not, I should have heartache. ‘Married to-morrow, married to-morrow, married to-morrow,’ is what they are always saying. But why not ‘To-day?’—why not *to-day*, I say?”

He snatched her little wrist, and squeezed it in his trembling fingers as in a vice. But for the unseen presence of her unknown friend, her power of speech would have frozen as before. As it was, she whispered huskily, “Because we agreed upon To-morrow.”

“That’s well; for you never deceived me, Mildred, as one did. That is why your Aunt Grace will never be long-lived.”

“Why so, Rupert, since she is a young woman still?”

“Well, to most persons—to *all*, in fact, *but* you—I should say, that’s my secret. There was once a secret kept from me by all the world, and now I have one of my own. You have heard of second-sight; that is nothing to the faculty which I possess. I can count one, two, three” (he checked the numbers slowly off upon his fingers, but never taking his eyes off hers), “four for certain, and perhaps five living folks; and I foretell that those persons will all die early, and two of them young. I have seen their faces, still, and pale, and cold. Now, where do you think I have seen their faces? Come now, guess. It’s a brave riddle. Not in the fire, though there are men’s faces there, but those are dead

already; not in the air, though there are faces there too, but those are devils. Let me whisper in your ear, for I hear creakings—on my *razor-blade*. I thought it would astonish you. That has been my magic crystal, my patent foreshadowing looking-glass, for many a day. I bought it with my first money long ago, before I wanted it for shaving. You see I don't shave *now*, because they have taken away my razors, *as they think*, and with them the most gladsome sight that memory or sunbeam have got to shew me—the faces of the men I want to kill. They are not all *men*. Look you, for I always carry it about with me—here is a woman's face. Do you not know it?"

"Yes, I know it, Rupert; but you would not hurt me?"

She gazed upon the blade, whereon was mirrored a beautiful face indeed—her own—but white with terror, and her lips parted with the beginning of a prayer.

“Hurt *you*, my Mildred? Nay, I love you so, that while you speak and breathe upon the steel, her hateful features fade away. But now—see—they come again; the hard blue eyes—the silken mesh of hair in which she trapped my father—the lips that whisper lies—the lily neck that I will squeeze some day. She is blotted out by quite a mist of blood, and then comes Clement—the fat-faced shrinking fool. How that man fears me, Mildred! I will kill him too, yet not too quickly, but as the cat plays with the mouse. Here’s that devil Cator; now I fear *him*. He has chains about him, whips and locks; he shut up Uncle Cyril,

the only sane man in our family, and then murdered him. Now, for murderers, the law says 'Death.'"

"The law, Rupert; but *you* are not the law," pleaded Mildred earnestly. "Yours are wicked thoughts. If you indeed feel tempted to do these people hurt, give *me* the razor."

"To-morrow, not to-day. Before I marry, I must wipe out old scores. My fear is that, having once begun, there will be no end; for No. 4 (I always call him that, but he *may* be No. 5) is certain as the rest. You see him, don't you?"

"No, Rupert; I do not wish to look upon that thing again."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the madman softly. "Look at me, then. Here is No. 4. I am short-lived, like the rest. That is why

you are wearing widow's weeds already. I thought it was for Raymond. There, I've pained you now. I thought so only in my dream. I dreamed that Raymond married you, and so it happened that this very morning whose face should come out on my magic crystal but poor Raymond's! But it was dimmer than the rest, and therefore I have my doubts."

"Would you kill your own brother, Rupert, and ruin your immortal soul?" asked Mildred, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking at him with such solemn earnest eyes, that Rupert's drooped their lids.

"Well, as to that," returned he, stripping the rose-branch still in Mildred's hand of its few leafless twigs; "Grace Clyffard—who is the devil, you know—has promised

me that, if I sign a certain parchment, all will be well with me, and safer than any priest could make it."

"Sign it, Rupert."

"You say so?" exclaimed the madman eagerly. "Then that is enough, otherwise, because she has plagued me with her 'Sign, sign' ever since—well, since yesterday; but there's something wrong there—I would never have done it. I will settle that at once; and would it not be rare to sign it with—— But that 's my secret. Have you any other commands, my love, my bride?"

"Yes, Rupert. For my sake, I pray you to do no harm to Mrs. Clyffard, nor to any other of those you spoke of. Now promise me, as you are a gentleman."

“Ay, there’s the rub; some people can make promises and break them, which I never can. Well—I will promise you to sign with ink, not blood, and to let Mrs. Clyffard and the fat-faced fool and Cator live—until to-morrow. Give me your arm.—No, not a day longer.—Hush! the peacock listens yonder; he has a thousand eyes to see with, and what he hears he tells.”

CHAPTER XI.

MILDRED'S FLIGHT.

AFTER parting, she scarce knew how, with Rupert at the west postern, Mildred flew to her own chamber with a mind divided between thankfulness and terror. She was deeply grateful that the dread interview—so infinitely worse than anything she had been prepared for—had come to any end not immediately tragical; while she trembled for the consequences which it foreshadowed. It was clearly her duty to warn her enemy, Grace, of the imminent peril that threatened her, as well as Cle-

ment Carr and Cator, at the hands of this unhappy madman. But her own Raymond, although his danger did not seem to be so instant, was to be warned also. What if, after setting her aunt upon her guard, Mrs. Clyffard—having obtained, in the meantime, what she wanted from her unhappy stepson—should put at once into effect whatever design she might entertain against herself and child; or even but make them, for the future, her close prisoners, so that she could not communicate with her husband at all! To be cut off from that comfort *now* seemed, indeed, a thing unbearable. To run the risk, however small, of such another meeting with Rupert, was something too terrible to be thought of. She wondered at herself for having sustained, even with the help of her unknown

and unseen ally, so frightful a trial, with sufficient external composure to deceive the cunning madman—if, indeed, she had deceived him. Might he not even now be committing those very crimes he had spoken of as though they were decrees of fate which he had been appointed to execute! Upon consideration, however, she felt as much conviction as the nature of the case permitted of, that Rupert would keep his promise, and for that day at least restrain his murderous instincts. Once persuaded of this, her resolve was fixed to escape from the walls of Clyffe—from the mad love of Rupert, and the cruel hate of her aunt Grace—at once and for ever.

Her husband himself had appointed the morrow for the maturing of his plans and her own departure; and now, after

what had happened, he would certainly not permit her to remain another night under that hateful roof. She would meet him as usual in Ribble Cave that day, but not to part. They would take Lucy with them—such a confidence had grown up between her and her attendant, almost, as it seemed, in spite of the latter's self—if she feared the wrath of the mistress of Clyffe, and was willing to change service; but whether Lucy proved to be a consenting party or not, Mildred was resolutely determined to flee. Let her attendant be ever so kind to Milly, and friendly to the interests of herself and child, and let her unknown friend be ever so watchful over their safety, Clyffe was no longer a place for them. With the necessity for flight, there came into her mind, as the

morning drew slowly on, all sorts of possible impediments and obstructions to it. Contrary to custom, Rupert was up and about that day; might not—nay, if he pressed the immediate signature of this parchment, was not Grace herself quite certain to be stirring likewise? As for the ruffian Cator, he seemed to need rest neither by night nor day, for his grim face was always to be seen where least expected; a cunning look, too, sat on his harsh features, which she did not like. Had Raymond really hoodwinked him so easily as he imagined? If not, then indeed did her husband stand in deadly peril.

Again and again, as the sun lingered on the dial in the courtyard, did she accuse herself (though never her husband, who was the one in fault) of insensate folly in re-

maining at Clyffe, when so many chances of escape had offered themselves. In vain she strove to reassure herself by recalling the arguments Raymond was wont to use at Sandby long ago with the same object: the power of the law; the certainty of detection, which must needs deter so acute a woman as her aunt from the commission of actual crime; the ridiculous notion of kidnappings, murders, private imprisonments, and all the stage situations of romance taking place at all in this nineteenth century. This last consideration, so generally popular with persons in commonplace and easy circumstances (who, by-the-by, read in the *Times* at breakfast, every morning of their lives, some case or other much more tremendous and astounding than any so-called "sensational", novelist would venture to put

into fiction), was not so comforting to Mildred as it doubtless would have been had not her personal experience so flatly contradicted it. We have it upon good authority, that the human hand is not the better fitted for a brasier notwithstanding that the mind may be engaged in contemplating the frosty Caucasus; and if all these weighty reasons for entertaining a sense of confidence and security had failed her at Sandby—before the attempted designs of Gideon Carr and the abduction of Milly—it was not likely that they should give her comfort *now*.

When a message suddenly came for Lucy that her mistress wished to see her immediately, and Mildred was left alone, she caught her child up in her arms, and prepared for instant flight. This surely was the time, before some order should arrive

from her aunt for her more strict keeping, to cross the solitary park; but even as she hurried on little Milly's out-door garments, she heard Cator enter his own room, the window of which, she knew, commanded the very door through which she must make her exit. Moreover, even if she reached the cave, Raymond would not be there for yet some hours, and her pursuers would be sure to seek for her there before he came, or if not so, to come upon himself, when recognition would be all but inevitable. She had hardly time to undo her hasty work, and conceal the evidences of her intention, when Lucy returned with a countenance even graver than usual.

“What are my aunt's commands? Tell me the worst! Am I to be more a prisoner even than I am?” cried Mildred, for-

getting all her caution in her anxiety.

“No, madam. It is for myself I grieve, and not for you. My mistress is dissatisfied, it seems, with my attendance on you. I am to serve you no more—or, at all events, not as before.”

“Is some one else, then—some jailor—to take your place?” asked Mildred, hanging with eagerness upon the other’s answer.

“Not that I know of, madam. But I am no longer to accompany you in your walks. Since Rufus knows you now, Mrs. Clyffard says it is no longer necessary; but I am afraid she has some other reason.”

Mildred’s heart bounded within her, and then as suddenly it seemed to stop and die.

“But the child? When I go out, may I take Milly with me?”

"Yes, madam; I was particularly to say that you were not to be parted from the child."

Mildred took Lucy by the hand. "Do not grieve," she said; "though I leave you for a little, I shall not forget you. God bless you, Lucy; you have been very kind to the friendless and the fatherless—I am sure she wishes us well; is it not so, Milly?"

As the child, for answer, put up its little mouth for its whilom nurse to kiss, the tears rolled down the woman's cheeks; then, as if not daring to trust herself to speak, she withdrew into a distant corner of the room, and took up some needle-work.

"I will not press you with questions that may embarrass you, Lucy, or to

which it is inconsistent with your duty to reply: but tell me, Where is Mr. Rupert?"

"He is with Mrs. Clyffard, madam."

"Alone?" asked Mildred with apprehension.

"No, madam. Mr. Carr is with them."

"And your brother—I heard him in his room a while ago—where is he now?"

"I left word with him to join my mistress."

"Do you know what their meeting is about? and may you tell me if it concerns myself and Milly?"

"I think"—the woman stopped and hesitated—"I believe not, madam. There was something to be signed by the Master. But I was to tell you, madam—at least I was to let you know—that Mr. Rupert

would not be about again to-day; and that Mr. Clement and my brother were both bound for Lancaster."

"Why, that almost looks, Lucy, as though my aunt would say, 'The coast is clear, niece; you may now depart from Clyffe, if you have a mind.'"

"Yes, madam."

"You answer as though you still thought some evil was intended; but I have reason to think that Mrs. Clyffard has obtained all she wants, and would willingly be rid of me. I have had a meeting with Mr. Rupert this morning."

"With Mr. Rupert?" exclaimed the woman, leaping to her feet. "Great Heaven! you have never done that! It would have been safer for you to have met Rufus ere you and he were friends."

“I know it, Lucy. He is mad—and more—he is bent on murder. Let your mistress and her friends beware of him, for he loves them not.”

“They will look to that,” returned Lucy more quietly: “they are all used to mad folks.”

Something in the woman's tone, as well as words, jarred on Mildred's ear, as had often been the case during the first few days of their acquaintance, but not of late. Its effect now, as always, was to reduce Mildred to silence. Presently Lucy left the room, and when she returned, they scarcely interchanged a remark until their mid-day meal; after which Mildred quietly began to prepare for going out. When she and the child were ready, and about to leave, Mildred said, “Good-bye, Lucy,” with a

smile, which the other easily comprehended.

“You forgive your jailor, then?” returned the woman gravely. “For a captive on the day she leaves her prison, that is much to say.”

Mildred changed colour.

“Nay, madam; do not deny it, for I know better than *you* that you will not return. May I kiss the child, please?”

Once more the woman's tears stood out upon her harsh and furrowed cheek like drops of turpentine upon the fir-bark. Then with a parting hand-shake, Mildred departed; along the echoing corridor, down the muffled stair, and so through the great hall into the empty courtyard. There, looking up at the window of the room she had just quitted, she saw Lucy watching them, with her still weeping face pressed

to the pane. Mildred paused upon the bridge that spanned the sleeping waters of the moat to wave her handkerchief in farewell; then she turned, and took her way across the solitary park.

Surely she was free now; yet what a weight seemed to oppress her heart and brain! Did her Aunt Grace indeed intend that she should make her escape? or was this fancied freedom but like that of some poor prisoned bird, forgetful of the string that tethers it, who flies a little way from its tormentor, only to be checked at his cruel pleasure, and be put back in cage? If Lucy knew her simple plan, how much more would Grace Clyffard be cognizant of it. Still, here she was on her way to inmost Ribble, and not a creature in sight to stay her! In a few minutes she would

find herself in the presence of her natural protector, friend, and lover: clasped to her husband's heart, she would fear nothing. With hands too eager for their task, she lit a torch, and took the oft-trodden way, unmindful of its unsullied glories—though virgin white as ever glistened the pendent crystals; and the fantastic forms that rose to meet them, rough with ten thousand ripples, shewed like new-drifted snow. Now on the pebble rang her hurrying feet—now the bare rock gave sullen token of their passage—now the silver sand received their noiseless impress; then with bent head, whose wealth of hair covered her precious charge as with a silken mantle from the tricklings of the roof, she threaded the narrow tunnel, at the end of which Raymond had always met her with a cry of welcome, coming from out

the darkness of that vast cathedral chamber like a star. This time he met her not. Her torch flashed full upon two human countenances, than either of which she would rather in that solitary place have faced a wolf's.

The one displayed the cruel features of her uncle, Clement Carr, and the other the grim and repulsive lineaments of William Cator.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE AND ITS PLANS.

AS soon as Rupert Clyffard had parted from Mildred, he sent word to his stepmother that he wished to see her upon a matter of the last importance in what he was pleased to term his business-room. Like many another dignified by the same name, or even that more ambitious one, "the study," this chamber gave no evidence of its title in its contents. Formerly, a few of the more faded family pictures, for which even the great gallery had no room, had adorned the walls; but the present inmate had caused

them to be exchanged for the portraits of such of his ancestors upon whom, in later life, the supposed ancestral curse had fallen, or who, in other words, had been "distinguished in eccentricity." Of Guy Clyffard, a full length had been taken, when advanced in life, attired in his favourite hunting-dress of grey; and but that Rupert's coat was a red one, the picture in its frame might have almost passed for a reflection of the living man; so like, as Lucy had said, had the young Master of Clyffe in these late years grown to his strange forefather: unshorn was *his* long white hair, unkempt *his* straggling moustache, and upon *his* worn cadaverous face dissipation had set the same sad marks which physical and mental illness had imprinted upon the face of his descendant. Rupert's

great-uncle, Roderic, too, was there, who had lived and died his own master as well as Master of Clyffe, but who had yet been mad enough to think he would come to life again to inherit house and land; the features, not unlike those of Ralph Clyffard's, but less firm, and not without a touch of cunning. Uncle Cyril's well-remembered face was the last of that long line, with lips that beamed forth kindness and good-will, as they had ever done on him whom they now looked upon (for he had loved his brother's boys), but with a certain glitter of the eye which boded evil to the man that crossed him. But there was one picture to which Rupert's glance had been directed from the moment he entered the room, and which he was contemplating now, with head aside, while he

awaited Mrs. Clyffard's coming—the handsomest face of all, so beautiful and waxen delicate that it might have belonged to some fair girl, save for the silken fringe upon the lip.

“How *could* she have played him false?” murmured Rupert, his chin sunk on his hand. “With one such as he to love her—and very kind he was, they say, when he was pleased—why did she not then please him? Why ruffle that broad brow? Why mar that loving smile? And he too—why for that fair Jezebel so strangely like”—— He heard the rustle of a dress at the open door, but he did not stir a hairbreadth—“so very, very like her portrait.”

“You sent for me, Rupert, did you not?” said Mrs. Clyffard, laying her finger-tips upon his arm.

"Yes, mother—I call you mother because Hamlet did—but *why* I sent for you, that has escaped me altogether. Perhaps it was to ask your opinion about Bertram here. Now, what do you think of him?"

"Well, he was a foolish headstrong boy, enamoured of a woman false as she was fair."

"How very, very like my father!" observed Rupert.

"Yes, a little like," returned Mrs. Clyffard carelessly: "they were both dark, and very handsome in their youth."

"But this one was never old."

"No; he died young."

"Ay, and shut up, poor fellow," remarked Rupert pitifully.

"The better for him, step-son, otherwise he would have been hanged. Do you not

know that for jealousy of that same wanton he slew his brother Gervaise?"

"Ay." Rupert faced suddenly round, and asked with fierce impatience, "But why did he not kill *her* instead? Those cruel eyes of blue, why did he not shut them close? Those lying lips, why did he not make them dumb? Those serpent locks, why did he not take them, as I might yours this instant, and wind them about her snowy neck until she choked?"

Grace Clyffard's face was ashy pale; but her eyes did not quail, nor her voice tremble, as she answered sternly, "Ask her yourself, Rupert; you have seen her once, and will perhaps see her again."

"True, true," stammered the other; "let us not talk of that; I could not bear to see her; it would drive me—— I am sure

I could not bear it. The last time—I marked it in the almanac here—was the very day of my poor father's death. I wonder whether she appears before all deaths. One, two, three, four—— What are you staring at, mother? Do you not know that I am here to sign the almanac—the thing that you have plagued me to do a thousand times. How does one sign an almanac? Let me write down Cancer for my name, because he was the brave crab that nipped your brother Gideon, and kept him tight till the tide came up, for which I hold him in everlasting honour.”

“Do you mean that you are ready to sign the parchment, which you have hitherto refused to do until you are married to Mildred?”

“Just so; it is only to-day instead of to-morrow; why not?”

Grace Clyffard strove in vain to quench the gleam of triumph that stole over her white face, and made her cold eyes glitter with eager greed; but she made answer carelessly, “As you please, Rue; but we must have witnesses, or the deed would only be waste paper. Shall we send for my brother Clement and William Cator?”

“Ay, do,” said Rupert slowly. “Give me the deed—you keep it somewhere here, I know—and I will read it while you fetch these men. One should read what one signs.”

From a locked drawer, in a cedar cabinet, Mrs. Clyffard drew forth a parchment neatly folded, and placed it in his

hands. It was Rupert's own will, whereby, in case his brother died before him without issue, all the lands of Clyffe were devised to his stepmother solely. She pointed to the place where presently he was to sign, and where the names of her brother and Cator were to be attached.

"But where do *you* sign?" asked he.

"I do not sign at all," said she.

"But that will not do," cried Rupert; "your name must be set down."

"It *is* set down," replied she impatiently. "There, there, and there again—have you no eyes? I will go ring for Lucy, and she will bring the other two."

"One—two—three—four," observed the madman slowly—"Grace, Clement, Cator, and I. This is to do all our wills in one, then. No. 5 is in it also; but then he

never stole my love away, as Gervaise served poor Bertram; that was only an evil dream. Time has not fled, as the whispering fiends would persuade me. All between is but one long, long night. This surely is my own sweet marriage eve."

He took the parchment to the almanac, and compared it with a date marked with a white cross. "Yes, 'tis the self-same day. To-morrow, I wed my Mildred. To-morrow, one goes to the bridal, and three to the bier. Ay, here they come. Now, see me sign, my honest witnesses. Clement the fool, put thy name below here; Cator the knave, write thine beneath it; and as for Grace, the foul fiend with the fair face, as Raymond used to call her—Grace is everywhere, like Sin. You do not smile, mother. That is hard, since I have done

all this to pleasure you. Now, I go to my bed—— By-the-bye,” he added, stopping at the door, and looking at her very fixedly, “to-morrow, being Mildred’s husband, I shall be your nephew; will that make any difference in one’s calculations? One—two—three—four. No; it all comes out as it should do. But I’ll ask my father, nevertheless.”

“What does he mean by that?” asked Clement uneasily, and not before the echoes of Rupert’s heavy footfall, so unlike a young man’s tread, had died away down the oaken stair.

“There is no meaning left in him,” replied Mrs. Clyffard contemptuously. “I suppose he refers to some ramble on the roof-top which he intends to take to-night, in hopes to meet with poor Ralph’s spirit,

which forsook him there. I often hear him on the leads above my chamber."

"Hear him! Hear whom?" asked Clement with apprehension.

"Why, Rupert, of course. Do you think that dead men walk?"

"I have heard," returned Clement seriously, "that spirits will sometimes re-enact the self-same scene which was fatal to them, or to those dear to them in this life, and in the self-same place."

"Then you have heard lies, brother, which it is not worth while to repeat. Leave such idle tales to folk like yonder madman. We that have wits must use them to better purpose. Now look you, Clement and Cator, this Rupert Clyffard is growing something worse than intractable; he is getting to be dangerous."

"He has been fit for the Dene this long time," grunted Cator.

"I know *that*," returned Mrs. Clyffard sharply; "and what is worse, everybody about him knows the same. This deed he has just signed would be quite worthless, but for the date, which sets it two years back."

"But is not that for—for—forgery?" stammered Clement.

"No, fool; or if it is, what then? Which of us three would witness against the other? Not I, nor Cator—of that, at least, I am sure; I wish I could say the same of my own kin."

She spoke with such contempt and bitterness, that Clement seemed to shrink within himself, and cower like some shelterless beast in a storm. "Forgery!" repeated she.

“Why, if I could not have got this man to sign, do you think that I would not have written ‘Rupert Clyffard’ here with my own hand, as like to his as I could make it? Have I gone so far upon my road—and yours—to halt for this or that? Have I done my part, taken my share of risk—ay, and more than my share—that you should stare because I say I would have done this thing? Do you deem that if this madman’s wild caprice had not chanced to be thus favourable, or if this Mildred should have failed to make him so to-morrow, I would have sat down submissive, like a perplexed maiden before her embroidery-frame, whereon the pattern has been woven amiss? Do you think that Clyffe and all you see, brother, from yonder window, and thrice as much again, and gold in bank, and

coal in Durham mines—read, read! 'tis here! —is all this to be got by me, and shared by you, without suspicion, peril, ay, perchance, and even risk of your own worthless neck? What! think you to make me your cat's-paw—*me!*—and never let your fingers feel the fire, but only itch for what I keep myself, after all's done?"

"I am sure, sister," said Clement doggedly, "I have always wished you well."

"Wished!" hissed Grace. "I wonder that you do not tell me I have ever had your prayers! What have you *done?*—but that you will have some difficulty of answering—come, what are you prepared to do?"

Mr. Clement Carr looked ruefully at his own signature, scarce dry upon the lying deed, as though he would have said, "That's not a little risk to run, according to my

prudent notions;" but his lips murmured something about his being ready to do anything that was required of him for the common good.

"That is well answered, brother. There is but one thing—and an easy thing—which you can do; and it must be done at once."

"What is it?" asked Clement huskily. "I won't have anything to do with Rupert."

"Of course not, because, as I have said, he has grown dangerous," returned Mrs. Clyffard scornfully. "No, let Rupert be *my* charge. You will find him quiet and subdued enough to-morrow, thanks to a certain treatment invented by myself, and quite unknown to you wise folks, who make lunatics their study. But with respect to *your* task, brother—you have read this deed?"

"I have, Grace. Rupert leaves all to you without reserve, in case of Raymond's death, and Raymond is dead already."

"Yes; but not without issue."

A cold dew suffused the fat face of Clement at these words.

"True," continued his sister, "the land is entailed to male heirs only, and perchance the will might hold; of this I am not sure. But if this child lives—she being Rupert's near and only relative—we should have 'Fraud,' or, at the best, 'Injustice,' heaped upon us in her name by all. Suspicion would be aroused, Investigation instituted, and—all that may follow is written in your tell-tale face, brother."

For the third time in that short space, Clement Carr passed his handkerchief over his clammy forehead.

"Let Cator do it," he stammered.

"Do what?" asked Mrs. Clyffard quickly.

"You have not yet heard what there is to do. And besides, Cator has done enough to show himself faithful, risked enough, done all but gained enough. Now, it is your turn."

"I will not commit a"—

"Hush, fool!" cried Grace, holding up a warning finger; "that is not required of you; but you will be what you have been already to-day—a witness. We must make these things sure. I will take no man's word. Gideon's word I did take, but I will take no other's; no, Cator, not even yours."

"Then this is my job, is it, mistress, and Mr. Clement is to look on?" observed the serving-man sullenly.

For once, Grace Clyffard winced. Her heart was hard as the nether millstone, and she had never felt the sentiment of shame. She could have borne with equanimity the loathing of the entire human family, if only they were made to fear her; but something even in her nature shrank from this brutal candour. She could contemplate the frightful crime she had in view with resolution; she was actually about to speak of the details of its execution; and yet, when her tool and minister, who, compared with her, was innocence itself, growled forth, "This is my job, is it?" her very blood seemed to curdle. To order lamb (for the sake of the mint-sauce) is one thing, but to hear the butcher begin to talk about *his* part of the business is another matter, and intolerable to a delicate stomach.

“Pray, be silent, Cator—it is your business to listen and to act—if action seems to be absolutely necessary. Perhaps your own acute intelligence, assisted by that of your master here, may devise some less unpleasant means of making this document something better than waste paper; but a method more safe, more absolutely without peril to ourselves, I do not think that you will hit upon. For listen. Ever since this disobedient girl has been held prisoner here, she has taken it into her head to visit Ribble Cave. Lucy tells me that she does so through some foolish sentiment connected with that—connected with her late husband. It was in that place, it seems, that the minx first drew him on to declare his passion, and laid the foundation of that plot whereby, for a time indeed, she

thwarted us, but for which she has suffered since, and is now about to pay the penalty to the utmost. And does not this jade deserve it? Did I not send for her hither, the orphan of one who did me deadly wrong, and place her higher than she could have ever looked for in her most ambitious dreams; and would I not have given her a position which any woman in the land might have been proud to hold—let alone a girl like her, with nothing but her gipsy face for fortune—and for return, did she not betray me, cross me, and almost—but not quite, not quite, my soft-toned niece—defeat me?” She spoke with vehemence, and yet as though she held converse with herself alone, making apology for what she was about to do by calling to mind her wrongs; then suddenly flashing

her falcon eyes upon her hearers, she added, with cruel distinctness, "Therefore it seems to me it is most fit that Ribble Cave should be the place of her just punishment, as it was the first scene of her wicked disobedience. However, she daily goes to this cave—she and her child—attended up to this time by Lucy; but to-day Lucy will not go with them. Now, what so likely, what so almost certain, as that this foolish girl, half maddened by her recent loss, and feeding on this foolish fantasy day after day, should end her woes by plunging with her babe in Ribble stream?" She paused, while Clement turned his white weak face towards Cator, which, as if reflecting something of the serving-man's grim strength of purpose, gradually grew firm. He smiled a sickly smile, and murmured,

“Good! The thing looks likely, William, does it not?”

“I always said Miss Grace, as was, was a clever woman,” growled Cator admiringly.

“I do not speak thus of my own thought alone,” continued Mrs. Clyffard. “The extreme likelihood of the girl’s committing suicide struck Lucy herself: but for her telling me that she did not think the cave was safe for my niece to visit, perhaps I should never have hit upon this plan. And look you, Clement, she may do it yet. For my part, like all others who hear the news, I shall conclude she did it; and if you and Cator should have reason to think otherwise, I pray you keep it to yourselves.” Seeing the serving-man was about to speak, she held up her hand for silence. “I want

to hear nothing—nothing. I have no time for talking. Do not suppose that it is you alone who have to act. This parchment being signed—and made by you effectual—I have to do what has been postponed too long already. There has been already much unpleasant rumour concerning Rupert; moreover, I am told that during these last few days there have been inquiries made, and even some attempt at collecting evidence respecting the young master's state of mind. This is dangerous, and the more so since I cannot guess the quarter from which the danger comes. But *now* they shall have evidence enough. They shall no more complain that Rupert Clyffard is suffered to take his own mad way. The country bumpkins shall no longer stare at his wild doings. That shall be set right this very night."

“What! would you harm him, too, mistress?” inquired Cator apprehensively. “Don’t you think that *three* such—ahem—sudden removals within the twelve hours would be a little suspicious?”

“Harm him?” rejoined Mrs. Clyffard contemptuously. “Why should I harm the man? But since he has become impracticable, and can be of no more use to us, it is high time he should be sent to the Dene. We know he will be taken care of by the good folks who have bought the place off our hands. Only he must be a little more ripe for it. But that’s my business; do you see about your own. What you have to do must be done to-day. It is time that you should both set forth for Ribble, but not together—nor must either of you be seen going in that direction. You will have to

make a long round before you meet. And be sure you light no torch, but wait in the Cathedral Chamber for—for what Fate may send you. Remember, Clement, this is the last blow we have to strike, and there is none to ward it; and without it all we have done and perilled has been but labour and risk in vain.”

CHAPTER XIII.

FRIEND AND FOE.

WHEN those two evil countenances met Mildred's terrified gaze at the entrance of the Cathedral Chamber, she mechanically started back.

"No, no, niece," cried Clement mockingly, and interposing his fat carcass so as to shut her in; "you have spent many pleasant hours in this place by yourself, why should you be so anxious to leave it now that you have our good company?"

"By *yourself*! he said," thought Mildred; then this man did not know of her hus-

band's having met her there, and almost certainly, if he did not know *that*, of his being in existence. Was it possible that Raymond had fled at their approach, as he had once done before, into Finis Hall? If not, he must be late, and would presently follow her into the cave. In either case, there was hope of help, which upheld her sinking heart.

“What would you with me, Uncle Clement?”

“Ay, it 's *Uncle Clement*, now, is it?” returned he with a sneer. “The last and only time we met, it was *Mr. Carr*, forsooth, and your ladyship did your best to be distant. I am not one to forget these things, *Mrs. Raymond Clyffard*.”

“If I was distant to you, sir, it was not of my own will, but by my aunt's—your

sister's—orders. You know that those must be obeyed."

"I do, Niece Mildred. We are here to-day to obey them; are we not, Cator?"

Even now, with only a poor shrinking woman and her child to deal with, this man liked to assure himself of a backer; even now, on the very threshold of his hideous crime, he drew some shabby comfort from laying it at another's door. His tone and manner froze Mildred's blood within her. Rather than appeal to this base wretch, albeit her own kith and kin, she turned to his grim hireling.

"*You*, at least," she cried in piteous accents, "I have never, even involuntarily, wronged. I did not come into the world *your* enemy, born of a hated stock, and

yet your own. Although you may be rough and rude, you are still a man, and — I know not what harm may be intended me, and this poor innocent child; but you will not, surely you will not lend your strength to this unnatural wretch against such foes as we are. Pity us—pity this little one, if such you have at home; and if not, then pity me, for the sake of your own mother.”

Not a sound came from the stern lips of the serving-man, but he withdrew himself within the gloom a little, as though ashamed to meet her pleading eyes.

“You dare not look upon my wretched face,” she cried, “so much of divine pity dwells within you yet. Oh, let your better nature move you a little further, and”——

“Silence!” cried Clement fiercely. “This is no time for tears and whining. You should have thought of some such hour as this, when in this very place you laid your trap for Raymond Clyffard, and thwarted me and Grace. You have well said that what she orders must be done. She orders this: that never again shall you or that cursed child—but for whom no such fate need have awaited you, and here you see how your punishment again crops out from your own perversity; I say we are here to see you never more return from Ribble Cave.”

“God of heaven! would you murder us, then?” exclaimed Mildred, hugging her babe to her fast-beating heart.

“No, niece; not so. We only wish to assure ourselves that yonder stream has taken you both from a world of trouble.

As I have said, I am sorry for this necessity, which, however, you have brought upon yourself; but after all, drowning is an easy death, and matters might have been worse—might they not, Cator?”

“Matters might have been worse,” returned his grim assistant huskily.

What little chance was left for Mildred now lay, she was well aware, alone in gaining time. Her ears, while they drank in these words of doom, were straining for the echo of a footfall in the tunnel, for a splash in the sullen stream behind her; but she heard nothing save the monotonous “drip, drip,” from the limestone roof, and the stealthy flow of the dark tide.

“Why do you appeal to your servant, sir,” cried she, “for sympathy in your premeditated crime, and yet forbid me to strive to

move his heart a little—a very little—from its cruel purpose? My child and I—if you only spare our lives—will never more plague you, uncle, nor Aunt Grace: we will leave this place, and take another name, and be as dead. I promise—I swear it.”

“So you promised, so you swore, niece, to marry Rupert Clyffard,” interposed Clement gravely. “Spare your breath; you might as well attempt to melt with it yon crystal statue, as to move Cator, honest fellow, from his duty.”

Mildred turned her eyes upon the stalagmite thus indicated, and shuddered to see how like it looked to the thing which it was said to be. A mother and child had already perished in that very spot; was it possible that she and Milly would be slain there also? Because the place was hidden from

the light of heaven, was it also hidden from its Lord? She prayed with dumb white lips that He would prove it otherwise, and that right speedily. It was now long past the usual time of tryst with Raymond, and of human aid Mildred began to despair.

“Come,” resumed Clement, impatiently, “let us have done with this. If, as you endeavour to persuade us, you would lay no claim on your child’s account to Clyffe, or aught belonging to it, were you suffered to live on, what advantage would there be in such a life? Why wish for mere existence, without a single possession that makes it dear? You are widowed, and poor, and friendless. What years of wretchedness, and, like enough, of shame, would there be in store for your helpless girl. Many a woman has

ended life for less valid reasons; and *you*—I tell you, you *must* die, whether or no; so, why not save *us* the”——

“What!” interrupted Mildred, passionately, “would you slay my soul as well as my body? Would you drive me to commit a deadly crime, in order to flatter yourself that you did not do it with your hands? No—villain, butcher! if you work your wicked will, it shall not be with my help. If I die, it shall be murder, and no suicide; and my child—— Oh! spare the child, good Cator!” she broke forth. “Drown *me*, if it must be so. I would rather that thou didst it, than to feel the fingers of that hateful wretch, whose blood is mine, press down my head beneath yon dark cold stream. But save my child; if thou art born of woman, save my child!”

“Take hold of her, Cator. Damn her, how she screams—these echoes make as though it were fifty women. Take hold of her, and put her under, since she wishes it, and leave the child to me.”

“To save?” cried Mildred, clinging to this straw. “Will you indeed save my child? Oh! do not mock me on the verge of death, but promise me that, though I drown and die, my girl shall live unharmed. God will protect her, though, alas, alas, He seems to have forsaken *me*! No one need ever know whose child she is. Good Clement, do you promise?”

“Ay, ay,” returned Clement gruffly—“give me the girl.”

“Give her *not* to him!” broke forth a terrible voice, at whose fierce tones the very cavern seemed to tremble. “Let not his murderous

fingers touch her innocent head! Oh! liar, cursed for ever, if but for that one lie! Thine hour—and mine—has come at last.”

Not a footstep had fallen upon the cavern floor, not an arm had parted the watery path from Finis Hall; and it seemed to Mildred as though Heaven’s own thunder had spoken. Indeed, such power and fury were in the sound, that it did not appear like human speech, and not until William Cator gave one stride from out the gloom, and seized her uncle by the throat, did she recognise her ally in the serving-man. As for Clement Carr, his surprise was greater than her own—so stupendous that it even overwhelmed for a moment his naturally acute perception of personal danger.

“What *are* you about, man? What *do*

you mean? Are you mad or—— Oh!”

Here the windpipe of Mr. Carr became too rigidly compressed to admit of further gurgling.

“Please to bring the torch here, Mrs. Raymond Clyffard,” said Cator hoarsely, “that this fellow and I may look at one another.”

Mildred obeyed mechanically, and threw the full glare of the pine-branch upon the two struggling figures, if struggling they could be called when the one was incapacitated from standing, and at the same time prevented from falling by the strong, firm clutch of the other. Clement’s face, compressed, purple, with the eyes dilated, from which, as it seemed, the wicked cunning had scarce had time to escape, and give place to abject fear, was a ghastly sight

enough; but that of Cator was far worse. Always grim and forbidding, the countenance of the serving-man was as disturbed by mental passion as was that of his master by physical violence; an inextinguishable hate flamed forth from every feature.

“He is not dead, mistress,” said he, in answer to Mildred’s terrified glance, and relaxing his grasp a little. “It is hard to let go of such a throat as his, but I should have been loath to kill him that way; he has got to hear something first.—Here, smell to this.” He seized the torch, and dashed it into Clement’s face, so that it singed his hair and eyebrows. “There, that revives him wonderfully;” and indeed, under that novel application of the burnt feathers’ system, Mr. Carr began to show signs of animation. After a prolonged fit of sneezing,

he proceeded once more to articulate his opinion that his serving-man was either mad or drunk.

“You see he can’t believe it, mistress!” cried Cator triumphantly. “He can’t believe that, after so long a servitude to him and his, one *could* remain an honest man!” Then pointing to his late master with a finger that quivered with passion, he ejaculated, “Thou murderer’s brother—thou twin-Cain—how I do hate thee! Dost thou think because I delay to smite thee, or because I loosed my hold just now, that there is hope for thy base life? There is no hope, no loophole for escape the size of a needle’s eye! Clement Carr, thou art come here to die!”

“You would not murder me, honest Cator—me who have been your master for ten years—and for no reason.”

“Hark to him, mistress!” laughed the other scornfully. “Listen to his whining prayer! He talks of murder—*he* that came hither to do a double murder—as though it were a crime! ‘My master for ten years,’ and ‘for no reason,’ sayest thou? Why, is not that a reason good enough, if there were no other? To live for ten long years the minister of thine accursed will—the instrument of villainies unspeakable done upon friendless creatures, chained and starved——”

“That was Gideon’s doing,” broke in the abject wretch: “you know I always said that he was too hard.”

“Yes, and strove to make him harder. I say nothing for *him*; sooner or later, he would have met his doom at these same hands (as thou art going to do), had not Heaven itself, impatient of his crimes, cut

short his course; but he at least was open in his wickedness, and met his death, I doubt not, fearless, as the better sort of vermin do. But thou—thou fox without the fox's courage, thou hypocrite—thou wilt drown yonder! Why dost thou shudder so? thou that hast just been saying what an easy death it is to drown! Thou wilt die, I know, a coward's death; calling on the God in whom thou hast no faith, and thinking to move me with thy lying words—*me*, a man, thou hast well said, as easy to move from his fixed purpose, as yonder crystal statue is to be melted by the breath!"

"Why should you kill me? why should you do me hurt?" cried Clement, fawningly, and almost grovelling at his foeman's feet.

"Because"—— began the other, sternly, and gazing straight before him with grave

eyes, like one who calls up the past.

“Cator, beware! He has got a knife,” cried Mildred, suddenly, and not too soon.

Clement had drawn a weapon from some hidden pocket, and struck with it at his enemy with all his force. But warned by Mildred’s voice, the other leaped aside, unharmed, and the next instant Clement’s wrist was hanging loose and useless, and the shining blade whirled through the air, and clove the hurrying stream with sullen splash. Clement Carr uttered one yell of pain and baffled fury, then sent forth shriek on shriek of frenzied terror, as Cator dragged him by the neck to the bank of the dark river. Entreaties, curses, and the vilest words that he could coin, flowed from his livid lips, and among them “Coward, coward!”

“Why Coward, master?” asked the other,

contemptuously, as he brought his victim, pale and breathless, and almost a corpse, to the very brink, whence they could see the tide glide by as black as ink, to the natural archway, where it vanished suddenly. "Why Coward, my friend of the knife? My plotter against mother and child of your own kin, why Coward, I say?"

"Because my wrist is broken, and you have got two hands to my one," cried Clement, viciously.

Cator laughed long and loud; then sternly answered, "Cunning to the end; false to thy latest breath. What advantage that ever offered itself in all thy treacherous life seemed to thee too base and mean, if it did but gain thine end? Nevertheless will I be fair even to thee; see, I will use my left hand—only my left—to match with thine:

thou wilt be a little longer drowning, that is all. Yon knife-work made me hasty, else I did not mean to slay thee quite so soon."

"Do not slay him," broke in Mildred, earnestly, and not for the first time by many; but her appeals had been disregarded hitherto by her strange ally, and perhaps unheard in his haste and passion.

"Then since you wish it, mistress, he shall live—almost a quarter of an hour—and listen to the tale I meant to tell him, from the first, before I send him hence to join his brother Gideon in the pit of Tophet."

CHAPTER XIV.

CATOR'S RECOMPENCE.

“MY story is not short,” began the serving-man ; “and lest this posture, with my fingers twisted in thy neck, should weary thee, my master, thou shalt lie down—so. Now, with my foot upon thy chest, so as to feel thee safe, and ready to squeeze thy life out, like a worm’s, shouldst thou shew sign of movement, thou shalt hear me out.—Two score of years ago, and more than that, my mother—Heaven rest her soul!—was coming across this hill that lies above us with a great burden. We had been

wealthy once—or what seemed so to yeomen-folk like us—but we had gradually grown poor. The house had lost its natural head, and though our mother did all she could, and more than her strength warranted, to keep want from us, it was coming with sure foot. She was returning from market, and having sold what she took, was bringing back some household matters of which we stood in need. A good mother, and a brave one, and if there be anything of goodness or courage left in me, this villain's servant for these ten years past, I owe it to *her*."

As the man said these words, he doffed his cap, and over his rugged face a look of loving reverence crept, like sunshine on a weatherbeaten wall.

"It was spring-time then as now; not

such a spring as comes to Sandby, mistress ; but what we northern folk are used to : rain, and sleet, and cold, and on the mountains mist a'most as dark as night, and more misleading. Our mother lost her way, and wandering from what little track there was, plunged into what we call a turbary, or morass ; not dangerous to strong and active persons in the daytime, but to her, fatigued and overburdened, and not knowing where to turn, most perilous. There, almost exhausted with vain efforts to escape, Ralph Clyffard, now among the saints in heaven, found her. The late Master, in his youth, was ever roaming over the Fells alone, although no sportsman, and he knew them as well as any shepherd. Not only did he rescue my poor mother, but finding her half dead, bore her in his own strong arms to our very cot-

tage-door. When we had heard from her own lips what the young Master of Clyffe had done for her and us—and never shall I forget the loving care with which he brought her in, and bade us tend her well, for that he knew himself what it was to lose a mother—she called both me and Lucy to her bedside, and bade us swear, so long as her memory should be fresh and dear to us (as it is to this day, God knows), to serve the Clyffards, mad or sane, to the utmost of our power. We did not need the oath to make us theirs; but they were rich, and in no want, at that time, of such help as we could give them. Years rolled on, and I dare say the squire forgot his good deed as well as those whom it had so benefited; but *we* did not forget, although we had laid our mother in her grave. But a time came when

out of the curse of the Clyffards fell an evil upon them even worse than it—the Carrs.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Raymond, and not for this alone. I know that I have seemed discourteous and unmanly to you many times: of late, as you shall hear, I have been so for your own sake, and the sake of that dear little one, whose grand-sire saved my mother’s life; but when I saw you first, the niece of that fiendish woman, of the ruffian Gideon, and of this reptile whom I have here beneath my foot, I gave you neither reverence nor respect; an evil seed, I thought, could but bring forth evil fruit. You do not know, nor will I vex you by a recital of them, how hateful were the deeds of your kith and kin. I had heard of them, though dimly,

but what I heard fell far short of the hideous truth; and when Squire Cyril was taken to the Dene, I volunteered to accompany him as his body-servant. There I did what I could for him, poor fellow, and for the rest of the wretched creatures in that loathsome place; but to all seeming I was as bad, or worse, as its master Gideon, or as this—— Ah! you begin to wriggle, my friend, do you? I thought this would be bitter news.

“Yes, I played the fiend to please the Devil; and I did please him; won the confidence of both these villain brothers, and even of their wily sister Grace. Yes, Mr. Clement, Miss Grace as was is doubtless a clever woman, but my deep hate overcame her cunning. I need not tell you how you starved and tortured Cyril,

and how at last Gideon slew him, in self-defence, as you would wish to say, if I would let you speak; but Cyril would never have attacked him, but that he was driven to it (as any man, sane or mad, would have been) by his brutal treatment. Before that time, I had been an unwilling witness to the wiles of Grace, and saw her capture in her toils the good kind Master in his old age and gloom. This I could not prevent, nor even attempt to do so without risk of a discovery which would destroy my usefulness; and I perceived that I should be wanted yet to shield poor Mr. Rupert, whom never shall the Dene receive within its cursed walls, although your sister counts upon it with such sureness. I could not then foresee that I was also fated to be, thank Heaven! the guardian of Ray-

mond's wife, and of his child—the last of all the Clyffards. But when Grace became mistress of Clyffe, her ambition increased with her new station, and all that thwarted it she was resolved to sweep away. I need not say what an unexpected obstacle occurred in your own marriage with Mr. Raymond. Her fury, when she found her niece had fled with him she hated most of all the Clyffards, was something worth beholding; and when I saw it, then for the first time I began to like you, mistress, as I never thought to like a Carr. Then I resolved to shield you also—being Raymond's wife and Grace's foe—from every peril which I could avert. When, after finding out where you had hid yourselves, your husband's death was plotted by his stepmother and her two brothers—of whom this wretch alone survives

to pay the forfeit—I was privy to their plans. It was I who accompanied Gideon Carr, under his assumed name of Stevens, to Westportown as his servant, and strove to put you on your guard—in vain. I was and am that Well-wisher from whom you heard so often without ever guessing, up to this last hour, who that friend might be. I was not indeed in time to save your husband's life—the bridegroom of two years—the father of yon helpless child—your only friend on earth! ”——

Here Clement made some movement on the sand.

“What, villain! doth that please thee? Darest thou to triumph thus, that art so near to the very gates of hell! Before thou goest there, I have a message for thee for thy brother's ear—*Raymond Clyffard is not dead!*”

An inarticulate cry like that of a wild beast in pain broke from the lips of the prostrate man. "It is false!" cried he. "He fell fifty fathoms sheer upon the sea-beach, and tosses now beneath the depths of ocean."

"Thou liest! Silence, devil! He did *not* fall. He is alive, and at Clyffe. This very hour he stands face to face with thy vile sister, and she too is under foot. But we all thought him dead, as thou dost; and I took the child away, and brought her hither, to keep under my eye and Lucy's, lest thy brother should slay her too. But that God's vengeance overtook him in the very act, he would have drowned her, and the mother likewise, even as I will now drown thee. Answer me not, or I will beat thy teeth in with my heel. The pent-up rage of

half a score of years longs to be loose. There, let that quiet thee!"

"Spare him, for God's sake, spare him!" cried Mildred passionately, as Cator's iron-bound boot crashed in the wretch's mouth, and ground him in the sand.

"Yes, mistress, I will spare him—but only for the Devil's sake, who is going to have his company—for five minutes longer. Where were we, Mr. Clement, when you were so indiscreet as to interrupt? Ah! I remember. I brought the child to Clyffe, as being the safest place, since I was there; and when Grace sent for you, madam, I likewise wrote to bid you come, for I knew that I could manage her and Clement single-handed. Night and day, I have watched over you and your little one ever since you set foot in Clyffe. When you came thither, I

thought that I alone was left to guard you ; but on the second day, I recognised your husband in his artist's dress. Yes, Clement ; the man Grace spoke of so carelessly a few hours back is her deadly foe, and by this time she feels it. I was close by when Rufus knew his master, and thereby told me who he was. My gun was in my hand that morning, mistress, you remember ; that was to slay the beast, if it had chanced to mislike you. When you had left this cave, I entered it, and made myself known to your husband, but bade him keep my secret, even from you. That was cruel, I know, but it was necessary. If once you felt that you were safe and among friends, your manner might have altered, and the crafty Grace have suspected something amiss. The cloak of guile I have worn these many years has

become so natural, that you could never guess me aught but the knave I looked; but Lucy—it was hard for her, whose heart is kind and true, to pretend hardness, when it yearned towards the babe and you. In case you did not get poor Mr. Rupert to sign the paper, Grace might have struck some sudden blow in wrath, such as I could not ward; therefore, I brought about your interview with him a day earlier than the time appointed. The signing of that deed with its forged date has brought this woman within our power, to punish or to banish from Clyffe for ever”——

“*I* will witness against her,” interrupted Clement eagerly, though with speech half-choked with sand and broken teeth. “She was always a self-seeker—Grace. I will do

my duty, I will indeed, good Cator, though she *is* my sister."

The serving man withdrew his foot in haste, as though the very contact of his heel with such a loathsome wretch had been pollution; and Mr. Carr, feeling his lungs once more in play, continued to improve the occasion.

"My testimony will be really most important, if you will only let me give it. I have known Sister Grace *so* long. She has never behaved to me as a sister should, I'm sure; nor would she ever listen to my advice. 'These plots of yours,' I have said again and again—you will do me justice so far, Cator—'are bad, and very discreditable.'"

"No, master—'are fraught with too much danger.' That was the line you always took. Do you think to deceive *me*, of all

men? No. Those who know you not may, indeed, perhaps credit your damned hypocrisy; but they shall never have the chance. Out of the talons of the law, thou, reptile-like, mightst haply manage to wriggle, but out of *my* clutch thou shalt never creep. If there is good enough in thine evil heart wherewith to frame one brief prayer, though, methinks, I might weave rope from out this sand as easily, make it, frame it. I would I could say, 'God forgive thee!' but I cannot."

"Will God forgive *thee*, Cator, who thus takest the law into thy violent hands?" said Mildred solemnly.

"I will take my risk of that, mistress. I have seen too much of wrong and woe worked in this world, to trust to law for righting it. Leave me to deal with this

fellow ; it is not a scene for woman's eyes. Art thou ready, wretch ? It is thy time for drowning, Carr."

With a great effort Clement Carr managed to seize Mildred's garment by the hem, and to that clung, in spite of Cator's efforts to unloose his hold.

"Then must I use my other hand," quoth the serving-man grimly, "for drown thou shalt."

"Oh ! Mildred, good niece Mildred, my own sister's child, will you see me slain before your eyes."

"Cator," cried Mildred passionately, "forbear, forbear ! For my sake, for whom you have done so much, I pray you spare him."

"I can *not*, mistress. I dare not let slip this precious time, for which I have been

longing through years of basest servitude, as Jacob longed for Rachel. This is my sole reward.”

“He has been paid, niece Mildred,” gasped the wretched Clement — “paid well and punctually—while during these late months _____”

“Yes, I have been paid,” broke in the other fiercely, “but every guinea, every shilling of it lies unspent, untouched, as though it were indeed that price of blood you dreamed it was. They bribed me with their gold to aid the murderer Gideon against thy own husband, mistress. Will you say spare him now?”

“Yes, yes,” cried Mildred earnestly, “and for my husband’s sake—for his child’s sake, whose innocent name will else be smirched for ever by this direful deed! The records

of her House are stained enough already with blood and violence. I charge you, for her sake, the last of that ill-starred race to which you owe such loving fealty, to spare this wretched man."

"Mistress," rejoined Cator sternly, and still keeping his gripe of Clement's throat, "ere I entered this place to-day, with yon base villain, bent upon sweeping your two innocent lives from his foul path, as he had already swept your husband's, I resolved within myself that never again should his vile body come between the sunlight and the earth, nor wind of heaven be polluted by touching it. No fitter grave, thought I, can it surely find than that black stream, fleeting, no man knows whither, into the darksome hollows of the earth."

"Save me, niece Mildred—save me!"

broke in the shrinking wretch. "I am your own mother's brother."

"Moreover," continued Cator, "I made oath this morning, while this oily slave was compassing your deaths, that never more should Raymond Clyffard's eyes rest on the would-be murderer of his child and wife. I swore it before Heaven."

"They never *shall* rest on me," pleaded Clement passionately; "I will leave Clyffe, England, Europe instantly. They never *shall* rest on me, upon my sacred soul."

"Upon your *what*?"

"Then, look you, Cator," continued the abject wretch, "if you don't believe my solemn—nay, pray have patience with me—— If Raymond ever look upon me more, I give you leave to slay me on the spot, to stab me, shoot me, cut me off by swiftest poison."

“Thou giv’st me *leave*?—and *poison*? I tell thee, Clement Carr, if I do not drown thee now, and ever again I even so much as *hear* of thee, then straightway will I seek thee out, with Rufus, and the hound shall tear and eat thy living limbs. Or if I come upon thee suddenly, alone or in the tumult of the streets, I care not how or where it is, that instant will I clutch thee by the throat, and it shall be thy last. Off! No words; let me not hear thy whining voice again. Off to yon corner of the cave, and hug thy life, spared at the prayer of her thou wouldst have slain. If mine eye light on thee again, if mine ear hear thee, it were better for thee to have been drowned in Ribble.”

Upon his knees, half dead with pain and fear, Clement Carr dragged himself

away, like a scotched snake, out of the range of the torchlight.

“Mistress,” continued Cator in changed and quiet tones, “you have robbed me of half the recompence for which I have toiled these ten years. Let us now to Clyffe, where I trust the other half at least awaits me.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST OBSTACLE REMOVED.

CHILL night had fallen upon Clyffe Hall, and with it for once Repose. The Master did not take his untimely sport, and hound and hunter stood with pricking ears, that listened for the horn in vain, in kennel and stall. A sudden change, Grace had caused it to be said, had come over his wild and wayward brain; and evidently a change for the better. Still there was danger in it. The lull might grow to long and settled calm, or it might end in storm. Let all about him be kept

quiet. The household must retire to rest, as though the hours of darkness were its accustomed season; let no lights be shewn. Mrs. Clyffard herself had set the example by retiring early, and in her own bed-chamber the lamp was quenched. She had neither sent for Clement nor Cator to inquire how their mission, had ended, and had studiously avoided that portion of the house which Mildred and her child were wont to occupy. She felt no sting of conscience for the deed which she had ordered to be done that afternoon, but it haunted her brain uneasily. Her purpose was as firm as ever, but not her mind. She had been wont to look as calmly on her Past with all its blots, as on the Future with its stubborn obstacles, and the means which it was necessary to use (for

so she reasoned, apologetic in spite of herself) to overcome them. But now she shrank from retrospection, and indeed from thought of all kind that was not relevant to the act before her. The wicked, who have wickedness upon hand, are so far fortunate; it is when they have gained all they have so foully aimed at that their worst punishment begins. Grace Clyffard, notwithstanding that she had steeped her soul in guilt, had as yet gained nothing. While Rupert lived, and was at large, she had laboured in vain. Her heart was weary of deceit and crime! She longed, almost as the Penitent, for peace, for the hour when there should be no further need for lies, demanding such continuous care in act and speech, and for violent deeds, from which anxious risk was so inseparable.

“But one more crime,” thought she—as though one launched upon a *glissade* in the Alps, and bound for a *crevasse*, should say, But one more slide—“and then my path is plain and level to the end. While this hair-brained fellow dwells here, I can never feel the mistress of Clyffe Hall. Why should I wait until his madness is full-blown? What sanity he has but shews itself in sly suspicion, which itself is dangerous to me, or else in open hate.” It was strange that she should thus excuse herself for what she was about to do, since she had done such far worse deeds than that which she now contemplated upon the road to her yet unreachd goal; but such was the case. Perhaps it was that Rupert had been his father’s favourite son: and

certainly the nearest approach to remorse which she had ever experienced had touched her with respect to her treatment of Ralph Clyffard, the man that had so deeply loved her, if after a somewhat doting fashion. In her scheme against Raymond, she had strengthened the triple brass about her heart by calling to mind his disobedience to the old man's wishes, as she chose to consider that half promise she had extorted from him about Rupert's marriage. Raymond had robbed his brother of the bride which his father, as well as Grace herself, had destined for him; Raymond, too, had so little reverence for the things the old man had held sacred, that it would have vexed him to have seen him rule at Clyffe. But Rupert, by no jesuitry of even her subtle brain could she justify

her present purpose against *him*; nay, there was something peculiarly abhorrent in it, inasmuch as it had for its object the very catastrophe the fear of which had embittered Ralph's whole life. In order to overthrow his son's already shaken intellect, she was about to employ the self-same cruel weapon by which she had done to death, although inadvertently, his father.

She knew that none but Raymond, and probably Mildred, had been aware of her having played the part of the Fair Lady of Clyffe. Rupert himself most certainly had no suspicion of it; and although he had of late become such a dare-devil in some respects, he still, she knew, retained his superstitions. It was not uncommon with him, when he did not hunt, to pass many hours of the night upon the roof of Clyffe Hall,

in order, as he had told her with bated breath, to consult his father's spirit, which roamed about the spot where he had died, on matters of importance. That very day, he had announced his intention of so doing, and ever since nightfall, Grace had been waiting for him there, attired in her old disguise. Crouching in an angle of the central tower, in her dark and shapeless dress, with her long hair streaming about her shoulders, and in her hand a shroud, or what appeared to be so, she looked, indeed, in the sickly light of that crescent moon, a spectre fit to imperil the reason of the bravest and most sane. Tarrying so long alone, in the very spot where Ralph had perished at her hands, as much as though she had driven a dagger through his heart, had tried even *her* nerves, and her face was worn and haggard with

that fearful watch. The night-wind, too, from off the wastes of Ribble Fell, blew full upon her, and chilled her blood, not only with its cold, but with many a strange and stealthy sound; putting shrill voices into the gargoyles' mouths, that seemed to mock her, even when dumb; using the water-pipes as speaking-trumpets through which to tell the household where the mistress was; and hurrying the blanched and withered leaves of autumn along the leaden roof, like some great company of ghosts without a burial-place in mother-earth, who run to meet grim Charon at his every ferry, only to be denied the wished-for passage.

At last she hears a door opened and then shut, and in the haste and violence of the action, recognises Rupert's hand. He can now do nothing slowly or with care.

To think, to speak, except by impatient unconnected -snatches, has long been difficult for him, but of late his very actions have become hurried. For a moment he stands irresolute, and throws a 'hasty glance in the direction of the skylight, ' by which his stepmother stands hid; then falls to pacing rapidly to and fro along the eastward leads. These are fringed by a low parapet of stone, beside which, ever and anon, he pauses, and looks down upon the rose-garden, which lies, although at a great depth, just underneath. Upon either side of it spreads the stately terrace, and below, the sloping lawn, ringed by the moat, here shining like ebony in the moonbeams, there lustreless as a pall beneath the overshadowing bank. Beyond, the wooded park, with many a hollow and knoll, blends southward with

the rich and teeming lowlands, and on the north, creeps half-way up the base of the barren Fell. But, for Rupert Clyffard's eyes, though bright and even piercing, Nature has neither charm nor awe; and yet there is speculation in them too. He is never tired of counting on his fingers One, Two, Three, and Four, and at the fourth he seems to measure the distance from where he stands to the rose-garden below. "There I beheld her first," he says; "down yon stone stairs, which ever since have seemed like altar-steps. Grace led her by the hand towards me, as the brier brings forth the rose. There was our trysting-place, and there—yes, there—beneath the roses, will I lie, when all is over. After life's fitful fever, men sleep well, 'tis said—I hope so, for I have need of a long rest—and where

so well as in the spot hallowed by their most sacred recollections? What is the chapel to me, or I to the chapel? Let Guy and Bertram, Roderick and Cyril, sniff the odour of sanctity—they like it; it smells in *my* nose like dead men's bones. Give *me* the odour of rose-leaves"—

“Rupert Clyffard!”

The young man turned, and beheld the boding phantom of his House standing close beside him. With a cry of terror, he threw up his arms, stepped swiftly backwards, and in an instant had toppled over the low parapet; but even as he fell, that Instinct which, unlike our fair-weather friend Reason, remains with us till death, made him catch at the stone coping, where with both hands he hung. Grace slowly thrust her cold white face above the balustrade, and then

withdrew it hastily, terrified to see him so near, striving with feet and fingers, whom she had thought by that time to be lying far below, and past all strife; yet not so hastily but that his upturned gaze met hers, and recognised her wicked eyes.

“One, one,” cried he, and with a frantic effort, such as a sane man could scarcely have put forth, drew himself upward to the parapet itself, and clutched it with nervous gripe. Upon his holding fast the issue of another life than his depended. If once he reached the top, not all the subtlety of Grace’s brain could have prolonged her life five minutes. She knew it well; she read it in the hungry looks which, even in that mortal peril, craved for vengeance rather than for safety; she heard it in the deadly menace of his “One, one, one,” reiterated

with frightful hate and vehemence, and yet as though it were her knell of doom. Grace had never meant to take his life, but only to rob him of what little store of reason yet remained to him. His falling backwards was an unforeseen mischance; but now that it was a question of his life or hers, she was not one to hesitate. She threw herself at once upon his clutching fingers, and with the force and fury of a wild cat, strove to unloose their hold.

“Fiend, liar, whom now I know, but you shall pay for this!” shrieked Rupert, breathless with rage, at least as much as with his ceaseless struggles. “I will spoil the face of this Fair Lady as sure as I wear nails.”

“Not so,” hissed Grace, as one by one she tore his bleeding fingers from their hold.

“What! you are stronger than I?” laughed Rupert harshly; “then I go to the rose-bed a day sooner, that is all.” Yet, with a madman’s cunning, even while he spoke he exchanged his clutch of the stone for her own flesh. “You see I have your hand now, Mrs. Grace. Since we are about to part, you must let me kiss it.”

But with a cry of terror lest he should bite it through, Grace snatched it from his now feeble grasp, and he fell swift and sheer upon the gravel walk which he had so often paced that very day, and lay there motionless.

“He sought his doom,” murmured Grace, huskily, as she once more peered over the balustrade. “He drew his death upon himself, and perhaps it is better so. How strange that he should have met the self-same fate as——”

Here she stopped, and turned, and listened, with her hand upon her heart, to still its rapid throbbings. Up the private stairs close by, which led from her late husband's room to the roof-top, there was a hurrying step, whose every footfall struck her with unimaginable terror. Grace knew the step of a foe as another woman recognises that of her lover. It was a swift and vigorous stride, such as she well knew had belonged but to one man in Clyffe Hall—and he was Dead!

CHAPTER XVI.

RUPERT'S LEGACY.

WHEN fear does come upon the constitutionally bold, it is overwhelming indeed. The timid fleeth at the shadow of the coming peril, whereas the brave man stands his ground until the substance is close upon him, and it is too late for flight. When a panic seizes a fighting regiment, the ruin is more complete than in one unused to war, which breaks and scatters at the first onset, and rallies again without much sense of having been beaten. In infancy, the measles are lightly caught

and easily got rid of; but when they do seize upon the adult, the case is severe in proportion to its rarity. Through life, Grace Clyffard had been almost void of fear; not so much from natural courage as from the possession of one engrossing idea—her own personal aggrandisement—which had left no room for it. When the mind is resolutely fixed upon one object, it is callous to influences which would otherwise grievously affect it; but when these rise beyond a certain limit, it is none the stronger for having hitherto ignored them.

Except in the case of Raymond, when he stood by the couch of his dying father, and regarded his murderess with such vengeful eyes, we have never seen Grace Clyffard tremble, save with rage; but the events of the last month, occurring as they did

after two whole years of anxiety and self-repression, had made themselves felt within her nevertheless. The violent death of her hated step-son had been eagerly desired, and the news of its accomplishment greedily welcomed; the destruction of his wife and child had been coolly planned, and executed (as she thought) without costing her a pang of remorse. When she looked down, but a few moments back, on Rupert's inanimate body, as it lay in the moonlight, with a broad streak of red athwart the white shut face, she had involuntarily uttered a sigh of relief, as one might do whose toilsome task is over at last, and who has only to reap the reward. All these terrible occurrences, in short, had been shocks which she had survived, but by no means with unimpaired powers of

resistance; and like a bridge which has bravely borne some tremendous test of its strength, her mind stood firm, but vastly weakened by the ordeal. Her physical powers, too, had been severely tried. Appetite had long deserted her, and the snatches of sleep which were still vouchsafed to her scarce brought any rest for dreams that were a kaleidoscope of her plots and plans by day. She had suffered more than she dared to own even to herself during her late lonely watch upon the roof-top; nothing but the reflection that what was about to be demanded of her was the last service which her pitiless spirit would require of her failing strength—after which should surely succeed unbroken repose and ease—had kept her to her post, the very spot where the only fellow-creature

who had ever loved her had so miserably perished, and she waiting there to accomplish the mental ruin of his beloved son. She had gone through with it all, and more; for was not Rupert's blood upon her hands? And now, when mind and body were alike exhausted in the dread removal of that last obstacle, and craving for the rest which had been promised them — Lo, the step of that dead man upon the turret-stair!

The words she had answered so contemptuously when spoken that morning by Clement, and which had intruded upon her more than once that night, again seemed to ring within her ears: "I have heard that spirits will sometimes re-enact the self-same scene which was fatal to them, or to those dear to them in this life, and in the

self-same place." Was she to see her husband once more stagger and fall yonder; and was his dead son indeed coming up to succour him as before, and to cast again upon her that look of hatred and execration which had never faded from her memory! As though to resolve her doubts, the half-face of the moon shone forth for a moment free from the hanging clouds, and her straining eyeballs beheld the little door burst open from within, and on the threshold Raymond Clyffard standing as in life, with his arm outstretched, and pointing to herself, while she heard his voice, thundering like the Trump of Doom, "Thou devil, I come for *thee*!"

At that dread sight and sentence, reason forsook her seat in the wretched woman's brain, and she fled up the roof at speed,

shrieking with maniac mirth. Her features, still distorted with the passion evoked by her late struggle, and crowned with frenzied hate, were a spectacle to freeze a brave man's blood, but not to evoke his pity. Raymond knew what had happened at a glance, but it moved him scarce at all, in comparison with that which he did *not* see.

“Rue, Rue!” cried he. “Where art thou, Rupert? Answer, Rue, Rue!”

The echoing walls that stood about the sky-light returned, “Rue, Rue!” The hearse-like woods replied in fainter notes; the solemn voices of the night that dwelt in Ribble Fell gave dimly back, “Rue, Rue!” The startled owl, taking its noiseless flight from the ivied tower close by, seemed to give like reply.

"Rupert, good Rupert, it is I, your brother Raymond!"

"Look in the garden; look in the rose-garden," cried a mocking tongue; and two fair hands were clapped together in triumph; and again that laugh rang forth, which, to the ear that has once heard it, makes all laughter have an evil sound for ever.

Sick at heart, Raymond hurried to that part of the battlements which he knew commanded the spot in question, and looked down. As he did so, a prostrate figure upon the gravel-walk beneath raised himself with difficulty upon one arm, and looked up at him. Brother's face met brother's for the first time after years of absence, and after what separates brother from brother far more than years—far more than broadest seas—suspicion, injustice, wrong."

“Ray.”

“Rue.”

Little indeed to say; but when heart speaks to heart, there is no need of words! Each loving monosyllable breathed forth as much of trust revived, enmity forgotten, kinship and old affection brought to mind, as could have been contained in a volume.

“I come, I come,” cried Raymond passionately; then dashed down the turret-stair, while the poor gibbering wretch, who was once his deadly foe, besought him in vain to tarry and take from her the shroud which she had wrought so cunningly for Rupert’s self.

From the rose-garden, along the broad moonlit terrace, men carried the young Master of Clyffe into the house, which would still be his for a little time. There

was a fire in the library, where Mildred, even then, was sitting with her sleeping child and Lucy (for she had not dared to retire to rest that night), and so they laid him there. A doctor, brought by Raymond for quite another purpose, was at the Hall, and did what could be done for the dying man. It was a question of an hour, more or less of life, he said; if the patient had been previously insane, that was not the case now; the shock which had given him his death-blow had, strange as it might seem, restored his reason. Mildred remembered well, when Rupert had suffered from that fall, on the night of his father's death, what a change for the better had been worked in his mental ailment, which began to develop itself anew only as he grew strong. She tended him now as of

yore, although in circumstances so far different; and as she sponged away from his broad brow, so cruelly marred, the blood that still welled slowly forth from his life-springs, his blue eyes swimming in painless tears seemed to beg of her forgiveness.

“I think,” said Raymond tenderly, “that my dear brother wishes to say something to you, Mildred, alone.”

A look of affectionate gratitude stole over the face of the dying man.

“No, no, Ray,” murmured he; “we have been apart too long: stay you with her. We three—and yes, her child.”

Then all the rest withdrew save William Cator, who, shaking his head in token of resolution, not to interrupt, but, at the same time, not to leave those four, took up his quarters noiselessly upon the doorstep, like a

dog on watch. Except the low moan of the wind upon the terrace-walk without, there was not a sound to be heard; and the only light came from the wood-fire, which slept and awoke by fits—now shining full upon some battered breastplate or lance-head, with its tattered and moth-eaten pennant, now flickering out upon the heraldic panes, and calling into light the weird, fantastic form of bird or beast—now sinking into semi-darkness, more suggestive of those strange surroundings still.

“I am dying, Ray,” began the Master of Clyffe calmly, “and can see nothing clearly with my outward eyes; but the inward sight, which has been so long denied me, is very clear. It seems to me, brother, that I see myself for the first time. Selfish—hush!” said he with grave pathos, and hold-

ing up one white transparent finger—"I know it—self-seeking, self-indulgent from the first. From the very first, I say. This was the madness, and no other, which I drew in with my mother's milk. My father had it before me; and his before him; and all the Clyffards yonder, whether they lived mad or sane. The motto of our House writ on that foolish scroll there is nothing to the purpose; it should be 'Self—Self—Self.' From the cradle I was taught how great a thing it was to be the Master of Clyffe—one of yon dull, stern folks, by whose hands, I think, no seed of good was ever planted—so great, that hardly could one grow to such a height. Nature herself was jealous of us, and had interposed an obstacle. We were so high and strong, we Clyffards, because we had called a handful of the

great round earth our own for a few consecutive years in the vast sum of Time—we were so prosperous, I say, that out of jealousy, or, mayhap, fear, the powers of Heaven had laid upon us a special burden. This I was given to know by hirelings, but not directly; I gathered it from hints and songs which, pieced together with scraps of vulgar rumour heard without the walls, eked out the story which my father's gloom corroborated. Then, dwelling upon this, and never for one moment suffering my thoughts to stray from him whom it concerned—me, Rupert Clyffard—I grew from worse to worse, until the prophecy fulfilled itself. I think, if Mildred here had loved me, this fate—if I can call that Fate which I myself had helped to bring upon myself—might have been delayed—delayed, kind, generous

woman, not averted. Had we married—for one who is pledged to death, dear brother, may say so much—I should have only loved her through myself. Sooner or later—but mark how, even upon the very threshold of the grave, the habit rules! And yet, for once, although I deal with ‘I’ and ‘me,’ it is not for my own sake, Ray. Dear brother and sweet sister, since God has willed it so, think not I take advantage of my neighbourhood to death, as some have done, to chide you, or to pack your memories with recipes I have not used myself, of how to live. Chiding would ill become these lips, indeed, even if you deserved it—you, than whom I know no worthier souls upon this earth. For yourselves, you have no need of warning—kind, unselfish, wise. But for that

little one—and others, if Heaven should send them—bearing this name of Clyffard, and brought up in this stately place, oh keep them from this bane of ‘Self—Self—Self’—the only forerunner of doom which in truth haunts Clyffe Hall—the only Curse that clings to this unhappy House.”

He paused for breath with pained and labouring chest, while Mildred, kneeling by his side, in silence wept; and Raymond, holding the cold hand in his, and chafing it in vain, dropped man’s rare tears. Then, midst the hush, there came a groan from nigh the door.

“What is that?” asked Rupert hastily.

“It is I,” said Cator, rising, and approaching the couch with downcast looks.

“Away, thou villain!” ejaculated the dying man.

"Oh, not so," interposed Raymond; "he always meant us well, both he and his sister Lucy."

"Away, away!" continued Rupert passionately, and covering his eyes with his hand.

"It is only natural, sir," sighed the poor servant-man. "We are known by the company we keep; and I have kept the worst. Heaven bless you, Master, though you love me not. When we two meet again, you will know me better." With that he moved away, cut to his faithful heart.

"Dear Rupert," whispered Mildred, "he loved your father dearly, served him dutifully; hired himself to basest masters to help your Uncle Cyril all he could."

"Away, away!" still murmured the feeble voice, quivering with rage as much as with its feebleness.

"Do no man wrong, dear Rue, at such a time as this," said Raymond gravely. "He did his best, indeed he did, however it may seem, for you, for me, for all of us."

The voice was silent, but the lips still moved the same "Away, away!"

"He watched by night and day to guard my child and me," urged Mildred piteously.

"Did he guard *thee*?" cried Rupert with sudden energy. "Then call him back.—Cator, I know not whether you be a true man or no, but give me your hand; and if I do not grasp it, it is my lack of strength forbids. I thank you; and if I have anything to forgive you, I forgive it."

Cator carried the thin fingers to his lips,

and kissed them like one who touches sacramental bread, then reverentially withdrew.

“Where is that man’s mistress?” inquired Rupert, when the serving-man had left the room. “I will forgive her too. Is she not Mildred’s aunt?”

“She is out of the reach of forgiveness and punishment also,” returned Raymond solemnly.

“Is she dead, then?”

“No, Rue, worse than that. A terrible retribution has overtaken her; her mind has left her.”

“Alas, poor wretch! You well say, brother”—here a shudder shook the wasted limbs—“that is worse than death.”

“You have not told us, Rue—and we must know,” said Raymond, hastening to interpose—“how came you in this plight?”

Did the unhappy woman in her madness"—he hesitated, and stole a look towards his wife—her niece.

"No, Raymond; I fell backward of myself."

"Thank God!" cried Mildred fervently; and from the depths of Raymond's chest came a great sigh of relief. Then over Rupert's livid and wasted face there stole a smile which made it almost young again.

"Remember, brother, for the sake of all who follow you, the warning which I spoke—the only legacy poor Rupert has to leave. Self—self—self: that is the Clyfard's Curse. And if your children ask to hear its history, then tell them mine."

CHAPTER XVII.

EVER AFTERWARDS.

THE seed which Rupert sowed with his last breath in that good ground, his brother Raymond's heart, took full effect. From the moment that he began to rule, a new system made itself felt wherever his influence extended. Over all the lands of Clyffe there was now a Master indeed—not merely a Sluggard nursing dreams of his family greatness, or creating for himself imaginary giants, which, in the end, became too strong for him and his. He was not feared, as all his race had been

before him; nor was he merely respected like his father—he was revered, honoured, loved. Time never hung heavy on *his* hands. Generation after generation of misrule, of rule by deputy, or of *laissez aller*, had left him quite enough to do on fell and field, in farm and hamlet. The spreading Park was no longer a shut paradise to all but some half-a-dozen human creatures. The Hall, as soon as the long days of mourning were accomplished, was set in order as it had never been before, and did not want for guests. The county families welcomed with open arms—as though he were some repentant prodigal of their own House—a Clyffard that was, neither Abandoned nor a Recluse. He was as good a sportsman as the best of them; but he had learned to live not only for

his own pleasures. I do not say that in all this Raymond Clyffard was seconded by his wife, because that word would do her wrong; not that she took the lead in anything wherein it becomes a woman to follow or not to meddle, but that she had a far harder part to act than he, and played it to perfection.

She was a Carr to start with, one of an upstart race, despised wherever known, and well known in those parts, and no mere town-bred folks can understand what a barrier to getting on with proud and simple country gentry is a misfortune of that sort. Moreover, though much was kept concealed, it was understood that to the machinations of Grace Clyffard—a hopeless, dangerous lunatic for life, but well and carefully tended in a place

far other than that to which she had doomed poor Rupert—it was understood, I say, that Mildred's aunt and uncles had worked great evil to the family into which she had married, an act in itself almost unpardonable, even if such had not been the case ; for eagles, said the country code of moral obligation, should match with eagles, and not choose their mates out of the nests of sparrowhawks. Nay, even her own household murmured something of this, and remembering what the last lady of Clyffe had been, at first submitted to her niece's rule with an ill grace. But Mildred had been used to be misjudged when friendless, and now she had her husband's love to strengthen her, and hold her firm before the eyes of all. Until they saw her aright, she was content to do her duty, and

waive recompense from others. But it came at last. One by one she gained her foes all over to her own side, by bribes that none with hearts can be so stubborn as to resist for long—Humility, Good-will, and a Desire to Please, that would not be denied, but rose again, no matter how cast back with smiles and pleading hands. Through all her trials, she wore the crown of Christian charity undimmed; not only that whose warm substantial rays give comfort to the Poor—although the path betwixt the Hall was well worn now by many an almoner's feet, and her own sweet face was as familiar to the eyes of her sick folk as was the flower in their window—but that which fosters Peace, and Trust, and Love, and from whose genial light shrink scandal and oppression, as the

nightshade shuns the sun. "Since I could win over Cator"—her ally only for another's sake, but hating her and hers, and jealous of her, with all the strength of his stubborn nature—"surely," thought she, "I can propitiate those who are merely my foes." And she was right; for to all but the veriest cowards it is hard indeed to fight when none resist; and, in the end, Peace and Good-will always remain the conquerors.

Be sure that Raymond and his wife, thus careful of their conduct to their kind, did not forget their friends. Walter Dickson, down at Sandby, had soon no need to smuggle for the remainder of his days, although he did it to the last, from love and habit; while young Richard Brock married Phœbe (which was to have been

such a long engagement, because he had no boat of his own, poor fellow) that same summer. The faithful servant who, for the Clyffards' sake, had borne so long his burden of contumely and disgrace, reaped as great reward as he could be persuaded to accept, in holding the same fields and farm his fathers held; there he worked and prospered, but a solitary and well-nigh friendless man; for the new times at Clyffe were not to his taste; the Master and his wife unbent, he thought, too much, and lost in dignity what they gained in mere love and honour; moreover, Cator, like his new mistress, had old antipathies and mistrusts to contend against, which, to one of his unpliant spirit, were insuperable. At his own special desire, Lucy remained at the Hall (a great do-

mestic Power, and especially in all things pertaining to the nursery), for he was unwilling that she should suffer through his misfortune, and felt fully equal to bearing his own burden, the carrying of which indeed, it must be confessed, was not entirely displeasing to his sombre nature. From time to time, however, he kept in play the fountain of kindly feeling, which lay too deep within him for ordinary occasions to evoke, by coming to see the Master, who received him always with the most cordial greeting, and to dandle Miss Milly, until that young lady grew too big for such attentions. She was not at all repulsed by his grim and forbidding features (as had been the case with Mr. Stevens of evil memory), but caressed him with a child's unerring instinct for what is really

estimable, as though he had been the Apollo Belvidere.

Another countenance, not remarkable for personal beauty, was also always welcome to Milly, as honey and the honeycomb, which latter it so greatly 'resembled. "Lor, godpapa," she would exclaim, alluding to the ravages of small-pox, "what a funny face you've got!"

"Yes, my dear," would the good lieutenant make answer, enjoying the child's naïve remark, while it chilled her parents' veins; "it's *very expensively carved*, is it not, Milly?"

But godmamma was even a greater favourite yet. The Careys had of course been informed of all that had taken place at Clyffe, and of so much of Raymond's strange imprisonment as did not hazard

discovery of the Martin's Nest. But at first, and indeed for many months, no invitation was issued from the Hall, even to friends so dear as they. When it did arrive at Lucky Bay, couched in the most affectionate terms that Raymond and Mildred could jointly pen, it could not be immediately accepted, for a reason as satisfactory as valid. Another stranger, very much smaller than Mr. Stevens, was expected shortly at the coastguard station, whom not even the sanguine lieutenant could suspect of being an Admiralty official. Of this promised joy, Mr. Carey wrote to Raymond jocosely, as men write to men, and yet with rapturous welcome of this coming child of his old age; while his wife wrote to Mildred in a very different strain, remind-

ing her of a certain talk they two had held together when left alone at Pampas Cottage. "I then referred ungratefully enough to that prematurely autumnal life of mine, crowned though it was with love and plenty; and now kind Heaven, rewarding, as its manner is, ingratitude with an unlooked-for blessing, vouchsafes me springtide. In a few weeks, I hope to be a mother." So when the Careys paid their visit to the Hall at last, they brought with them an infant son, who bore the name of his father's friend and host. The next year they came again, and every year, and more than once the Clyffards returned their visit, but not to Lucky Bay. Somehow or other, the lieutenant's merits did get acknowledged at last; and although he never got a ship, which would have separated him from his darling child, out of

whose sight the affectionate old fellow could scarcely bear to be, he got promotion, and increase of income, such as enabled him to meet his growing charges, and even to put by for little Ray.

"I know how it all comes," whispered Mrs. Carey, with eyes that swam in tears, to her beloved friend, as true in prosperity as in her days of bitter trial; "I know who jogs the elbows of these gentlemen in office. We might have waited long enough for this, but for your husband's influence."

"But not one word!" cried Mildred, sealing her quivering lips with a dainty finger. "If you owe him any thanks, he is best paid by silence. Let the lieutenant credit these people with it all; it is always good to think well of those we serve. To hear a sailor praise the sea-powers that be, is rare

indeed—and ‘By the Lord Harry’ too!—
No, not one word, dear Marion, if you love
us.”

So time drew on, touching with mellow and tender tints the natures of Raymond and of Mildred, but leaving the core of youth untouched. As though to make up for their stormy spring-time, the summer of their lives was well-nigh cloudless. Perhaps, in the wife’s secret heart, there may have lurked a desire for a son, whose life should have borne witness against evil tradition, and rescued his family name from superstitious slur. But this was not to be. What could be done to chase away the shadows from Clyffe Hall, however, was done, and that effectually. It was so given to hospitality, that the very idea of an apparition, the origin of which could not be clearly

traced to supper, would have been scouted. At Christmas-time, in particular, there really was no accommodation for a ghost; the rooms were full. Many a glorious game of "Hide and Seek" had Milly and Ray Carey, with a host of happy romping boys and misses, in the once shunned secret chambers of the Hall, while the echoes of their childish laughter filled the gloomy corridors; often, on the walls of the long gallery, the frowning Clyffards were made unwilling witnesses of "Hunt the Hare" and "Blind Man's Buff." The most favourite place to hide in was, I think, that very chamber within the chimney of the Blue Room, where Grace Clyffard had concealed herself (for it had an entrance from without), and caused her brother Clement to pass so uncomfortable a night.

As Milly grew up, there were of course festivities of another kind, of which her old playmate was no less constantly a partaker—"Ray" still to her, although to the world, especially the Admiralty (who kept their eye upon him, by the Lord Harry, as they had done upon his father), he was Lieutenant Raymond Cary, R.N., a very rising young officer indeed, who had been mentioned in dispatches. At last a day arrived when playmate and lover led up—as leaf and blossom to fruit—to Husband. There were many, of course, to call the match unequal; some even to say that after all there must be something wrong in the Clyffard blood which led them to ally themselves so strangely. But since Miss Mildred had decided thus for herself; and since the marriage in question had been the most che-

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rished wish of her parents' hearts for years ; and since the scruples of the bridegroom's father (who was, however, proud and obstinate against it, much beyond what had been looked for) were finally overcome—perhaps, after all, the alliance was not so monstrous and deplorable. At all events, it took place ; and none even of those, I have understood, who had spoken against it with the greatest reprobation, declined to accept the invitations that were issued for the ball.

If any gloom still clung to the family mansion of the Clyffards, the last shade of it must have been expelled upon that occasion. It was observed by one old county fogey (who made a reputation out of the remark for the evening) that night had not been so turned into day since Rupert Clyffard's time ;

and it was certainly a most brilliant and joyous gathering. The ancient lieutenant and his still comely wife, in spite of the "scheming" with which they were credited by the great folk who had marriageable sons, won all hearts.

Ere the bride had departed that morning she had embraced them both with an affection scarcely less than that she exhibited for her own beloved parents. "Look here, godpapa," said she, pointing to the bridal veil, which was indeed a miracle of beauty, and worthy of the fair face it covered. "This is a present, sent—from whence do you think? Now guess. No, not aloud; I must whisper it in your ear. It came last night, from some old friends of papa and mamma—at Sandby."

"At Sandby!" cried the old gentleman,

throwing up his hands in horror. "Your parents, my dear, kept very bad company in those parts." He took the delicate fabric between his finger and thumb, and ruefully delivered himself of this opinion: "Smuggled! by the Lord Harry, smuggled!"

THE END.









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